

OOM BEY FOR THE FUTURE:  
ENGAGING THE WITNESS OF  
*Beyers Naudé*



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(Editors)



BEYERS NAUDÉ CENTRE SERIES ON PUBLIC THEOLOGY



Beyers Naudé Centre Series on Public Theology Volume 2

# OOM BEY FOR THE FUTURE

## Engaging the witness of Beyers Naudé



*Oom Bey for the future: Engaging the witness of Beyers Naudé*  
*Beyers Naudé Centre Series on Public Theology*

Published by SUN PRESS, a division of AFRICAN SUN MeDIA, Stellenbosch 7600  
[www.africansunmedia.co.za](http://www.africansunmedia.co.za)  
[www.sun-e-shop.co.za](http://www.sun-e-shop.co.za)

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First edition 2006  
ISBN: 978-1-920109-29-5

e-ISBN: 978-1-920109-30-1

DOI: 10.18820/9781920109301

Cover design by Soretha Botha  
Typesetting by SUN MeDIA Stellenbosch  
Set in 10/12 Palatino Linotype

SUN PRESS is a division of AFRICAN SUN MeDIA, Stellenbosch University's publishing division. SUN PRESS publishes academic, professional and reference works in print and electronic format. This publication may be ordered directly from [www.sun-e-shop.co.za](http://www.sun-e-shop.co.za)

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In 1972 a series of articles appeared in *Pro Veritate* entitled “Die Toekoms en...” (The Future and...). As part of this series Beyers Naudé wrote in an article called “Die Toekoms en ...kleur, kolonialisme en kommunisme” (The Future and...colour, colonialism and communism):

“South Africa is a microcosm of the contemporary world. Here white and black, East and West, rich developed First World and poor developing Third World meet as in no other country in the world: this sets a tremendous challenge, but it is also a unique privilege. In the melting-pot of this meeting Christians who want to live out their faith have an incomparable opportunity to witness to justice, love of neighbour, truth and compassion.” (*Pro Veritate*, 15 January 1972, pp. 5-7, 20.) (Translation – eds)

Has this situation changed in our country since he wrote these words more than thirty years ago, and, if so, how? What are the challenges facing South Africa and Africa today, and how are we to respond to these challenges? Most importantly, what can we as South African Christians learn from the life and example of Beyers Naudé in light of these challenges? These, broadly speaking, are the questions this publication wants to address. This is not the first time these questions will be reflected upon. In fact, this was already done to some extent in the first publication by the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology, *The Legacy of Beyers Naudé* (SUN PReSS, 2005). Such reflection will also, in all likelihood, be done again in future. This is not only because ongoing reflection and the promotion of knowledge about the role, task and responsibility of public theology is one of the main objectives of the Centre. It is also because of the nature of the life and message of Beyers Naudé, which seems to demand such ongoing reflection. As Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane, Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, commented in his foreword to *The Legacy of Beyers Naudé* (pp. 3, 5-6), which was simultaneously the foreword to the whole series of publications to follow, including the current one:

“Beyers Naudé was a remarkable man, and he has left us a remarkable legacy. This book and those to follow in the series on public theology will help ensure that this legacy is not lost, but instead remains a firm foundation on which we can build...Now that political change has come, we cannot afford to become complacent...we too must make a conscious choice about the road we wish to follow. The life of Beyers Naudé and the work of Beyers Naudé will be one of our best guides to the road ahead.”

If this volume, then, will also reflect on the life and legacy of Beyers Naudé, how does it hope to differ from the first volume in the series? The difference lies, firstly, in a characteristic shared by the majority of the contributors. Secondly, it lies in the difference in emphases between the two publications. It is to these differences that the title of the publication allude. The idea for this publication came from a mini-conference hosted by the Beyers Naudé Centre at Stellenbosch on 24 August 2005 under the title *Oom Bey for the Future*. For the conference a number of younger voices from the theological community – as well as one young philosopher – were invited to reflect, with reference to their own interests, research and experiences of living in South Africa and Africa today, on the challenges that the life and thought of Beyers Naudé still presents for Christians in this country and further afield. The title *Oom Bey for the Future* therefore firstly points to the fact that most of the contributors, should they have met Beyers Naudé, would have addressed him, as they often refer to him in their contributions, with the respectful Afrikaans “Oom” used by young people when speaking to or of an older man. While all the contributors to *The Legacy of Beyers Naudé* knew him well, some having had the privilege of experiencing his friendship for years, even decades, and could all speak on the basis of their personal relationship with the man and his work, the latter is true of only one of the contributors to this volume. Only Stephen Hayes had known Oom Bey for a long time – we are sure that he will not object if we do not include him in the category of “younger voices.” Of the remaining contributors who met Oom Bey, most had done so only once or twice. However, even if the majority of contributors did not have the privilege of meeting Oom Bey, we think that this publication is important since it can be seen as a first exercise, undertaken under the auspices of the Beyers Naudé Centre, in reflecting on his life and work and their relevance by a generation who will increasingly have to do so without the benefit of having known the man personally or having had a personal relationship with him; they thus have recourse only to what has been written by him, or on him, by those who did know him. The title *Oom Bey for the Future* also refers to the specific emphasis of this volume. Contributors to *The Legacy of Beyers Naudé* mostly referred to past events and experiences, albeit also with the future in mind. The current volume will specifically be geared towards the future challenges set by Oom Bey in his long and turbulent career. A prerequisite, therefore, for inclusion in this publication was that contributions had to reflect on one of its two themes, with reference to the legacy of Beyers Naudé: either aspects related to the *future* of our country and the world in general or, more specifically, on aspects of the future with a special emphasis on its *youth*, or both.

Finally, before we give an overview of the specific contents of the publication, the reader will also notice that, as was the case in *The Legacy of Beyers Naudé*, we have again endeavoured “to let the man speak for himself.” We therefore inserted between the contributions a selection of writings by Oom Bey under the heading



*FROM THE ARCHIVES.* As was to be expected, the selection of this material was again a difficult task, but it was done with this publication's themes of the future and the youth in mind. Amongst these articles, which cover a period of 44 years of Oom Bey's life, are previously published articles as well as never before published addresses and sermons, or notes for these that Beyers Naudé himself made and delivered at a great variety of occasions and to diverse audiences. The material from the archives also includes, for the first time in print, an interview with Oom Bey in 1996. Finally, regarding the arrangement of this material, this was not done chronologically but again placed as close as possible to contributions to which we felt they might be relevant.

The first contribution is an article by Christoff Pauw entitled "Beyers Naudé, the Secular Christian." In his article Pauw searches for possible explanations for "Naudé's remarkable ability to strike a balance between his evangelical roots and his sense of realism." Pauw not only gives a possible interpretation of Beyers Naudé's theological identity and spirituality – which he describes as that of "a secular Christian" – but also reflects on the possible sources for this spirituality of Oom Bey's. At the same time Pauw's article serves as an important orientation to the most important events and influences in the life of Oom Bey. In accordance with the themes of this publication he also explores the relevance of a spirituality such as Oom Bey's, which combines "a keen social awareness coupled with a desire 'to obey God rather than men,'" for young people in South Africa today. The earliest of the material from the Beyers Naudé Archives published in this volume follows Pauw's article. "The Land of Promise" is an address to the *Kerkjeugvereniging* by Naudé from 1952 and can be read against the background of Pauw's observations on Naudé's spirituality, especially evident in the close relationship between the hunger for food and for salvation. In the address, years before what he later termed his 'conversion' to the cause of the oppressed, but only days before the celebration of the three hundredth anniversary of the coming to South Africa of Dutch settlers and the Reformed faith, one already notices his conviction that Christians not only need a God-inspired vision of the future, a vision that is in accordance with the Kingdom of God, but that the youth also have a role to play in fulfilling this vision.

In "Oom Bey and the Youth: Three Challenges for the Future," Len Hansen endeavours to show that "Beyers Naudé undeniably had a heart for the youth of South Africa" and that "Oom Bey had a message for the youth is equally undeniable." By making extensive use of material from the archives of the Beyers Naudé Centre, Hansen identifies "three challenges to which Beyers Naudé rose: to see, to judge and to act, in that order", and argues that "[a]lthough these challenges are applicable to all South Africans today, ...Oom Bey confronted and still confronts the *youth* of today with these same challenges." One of Beyers Naudé's earliest statements on the importance of the youth for the life of the Church was written as an editorial for *Pro Veritate* in 1963, to which Hansen also

refers. In “The Churches Answer Young People’s Questions,” Oom Bey appeals to churches to inform and instruct their youth regarding their political responsibilities and decisions in the light of their faith. He also admonishes churches for the “glaring discrepancy between creed and life, theory and practice, which is driving people away from the Church and from Christianity.” In keeping with Christoff Pauw’s earlier comments on Oom Bey’s spirituality, one also notes here that Oom Bey warns against “[a] Christianity which retreats into a personal piety with a faith divorced from life in all its aspects” as this will “not only lose its power to witness to the outside world, but it also stands in danger of losing its youth – and thereby its whole future.”

We were all very gratified when Dr Stephen Hayes offered to donate material to the Beyers Naudé Archives in 2005. Dr Hayes not only had first-hand experience of the life and work of Beyers Naudé and the Christian Institute, of which he was also a member since 1963, the year of its inception, but even shared Oom Bey’s experience of being banned. He also participated in local Bible study groups started by the CI, and, at the urging of Oom Bey, started CI youth groups in Durban and also tried to start similar groups among the rural Zulu speakers in the Natal midlands in the late 1960s and early 1970s. At our request, and with the theme of our publication in mind, Dr Hayes has written an eyewitness account of these turbulent times and trying events as well as of his experiences of Oom Bey, experiences that also clearly show the latter’s concern with the youth. The editorial, “South Africa Tomorrow,” written by Beyers Naudé for *Pro Veritate*, also reflects the situation in South Africa during the turbulent 1970s of which Stephen Hayes writes. In this editorial Oom Bey warns of the growing resentment against the political dispensation in South Africa, of the danger in ignoring the findings and recommendations that SPROCAS (Study Project on Christianity in an Apartheid Society) had made under the auspices of the Christian Institute. One also reads in the editorial the special, albeit slightly different, messages that Oom Bey had at the time for Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking South Africans in the face of these storm clouds gathering on the country’s political horizon.

Godwin Akper focuses on the theme of resistance and hope in the life of Beyers Naudé – resistance to “forces that were put in place to suppress any attempt...to liberate people of colour in South Africa” and the hope “that there is a future...for South Africa and for Southern Africa, beyond struggles and liberation.” With this resistance and hope in mind, Akper describes two possible futures, one positive and one negative, that Oom Bey foresaw for the country. Finally, Akper takes stock of the state of church and society today and identifies factors within it that still threaten the realisation of the positive future Oom Bey hoped for and promote the negative future against which he warned decades ago. Akper’s article is followed by one its primary sources, Beyers Naudé’s address to the graduates of the Edendale Theological Seminary at Pietermaritzburg in 1977, which was later published in *Pro Veritate* as “Christian Ministry in a Time of Crisis”. On that

occasion Naudé sketched South Africa's possible futures, while at the same time warning of the demands this would make on the ministry of the young graduates, but he also encouraged them to rise to these challenges.

In "The Confession of Belhar: Embodying the Future in the Light of Oom Bey's Legacy," Anlené Taljaard describes Naudé as "a figure of resistance, solidarity and hope." She reflects on these three defining characteristics of Beyers Naudé, especially with regard to his resistance to a heresy, his solidarity with the oppressed and his hope for a changed society. These three elements lead her to pose the difficult questions to her own generation as to what *they* resist, with whom *they* are in solidarity and what *they* hope for today? She explores possible answers to these questions by drawing on the example of Oom Bey and relates this to the demands for unity, reconciliation and justice in the Confession of Belhar. Given the topicality of the issue of the Confession of Belhar for the future of unification of the Dutch Reformed Church and the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, it seemed appropriate to place next a sermon on Mat. 16:13-23, "Does the Church still have a Future?", which Oom Bey delivered in 1960 at the Aasvoëlkop Congregation. According to him, not only the future of our country, but especially that of the Church, should in the first place be determined and *was* being determined by Christ alone. Secondly, this future is closely connected to and determined by, not the pronouncements or actions of church hierarchies, but foremost by the witness of the lives of every Christian. In her contribution to this volume, Dr Mary-Anne Plaatjies-Van Huffel gives "an exposition, done against a post-structuralist background of the question of women in the theological anthropology of Beyers Naudé." While not ignoring the importance of his unique contributions to the struggle for liberation, she shows by means of a critical, close reading of three of the most important and most widely known sources of his thought exactly with how much circumspection we must approach what and how we speak or write. In looking at these three sources, Plaatjies-Van Huffel argues that one can say that even Naudé was in certain respects a child of his time and a product of his upbringing. While she laments the fact that "women's issues were for the most part ignored during the struggle for social justice," Dr Plaatjies-Van Huffel gives some guidelines, with a view to the future, for the deconstruction of women in traditional, patriarchal theological anthropology that might help to address shortcomings in our perceptions, portrayals and language with regard to women. One finds one of the clearest accounts of Beyers Naudé's hopes and fears for the future of South Africa in "The South Africa I Want," an address to the students of the University of Cape Town on 3 June 1976, a mere 13 days before the Soweto Student Uprising, one of the turning points in the struggle for liberation in South Africa. In the address Oom Bey gives his own summary of the deplorable state of injustice and oppression in the country and reiterates one of the most important themes of his message to the country in general and to the youth specifically: the need for every person to decide what kind of future South Africa

he or she wants, taking responsibility for that decision and remaining committed to seeing it realised in the face of adversity. This is what Oom Bey himself did, secure in the conviction that “[a] new South Africa is being born – a South Africa in which I wish to live, a South Africa in which I wish our children to live, a South Africa in which I wish to give myself to all the people of our land.”

Recalling his experiences as a student of the hospitality he and many others received from Beyers and Ilse Naudé on visits to their home in Johannesburg during the late 1980s, Robert Vosloo calls attention to yet another aspect of Oom Bey’s character. He argues that hospitality, which he defines as “the welcoming openness towards others, the other and otherness” as exemplified by the Naudés, is also related to one’s “willingness to open one’s *identity* to the other, and also to see oneself *as* other.” With reference to the communities who welcomed the Naudés after they were ostracized by the Afrikaner community and their reaction to it, the Naudés also serve as exemplifications of the fact that “hospitality is not only about welcoming, but also...about *being welcomed*, about *receiving* hospitality.” Finally Vosloo makes the connection between hospitality and truth-telling which for him form two key aspects of the witness and legacy of Oom Bey. It is also this legacy which still challenges us “to embody these concepts in a new and creative way in our complex and changing world.” Vosloo’s reflections, which begin with his telling of his visit to the Naudés in Johannesburg while a theology student at Stellenbosch, are followed by a sermon that Oom Bey preached to the student congregation of the Dutch Reformed Church on that campus some years afterwards, in 1992. In this sermon, on the eve of the creation of the new South Africa, one again hears Oom Bey urging young people to take responsibility for the future of their country, urging them to make their political voice heard, but, as always, to do this in accordance with the demands of the Kingdom of God.

Yvonne Malan also comments on the importance of Beyers Naudé, the magnitude of his sacrifices for the plight of the oppressed in South Africa and, given his background, their extraordinary nature. She does, however, remind us of a fact often forgotten in publications like these, namely that Oom Bey was not the only white Afrikaner from a traditional background who suffered for his convictions. Malan compares the lives and trials (literally and figuratively), and the vindication or lack of vindication, of Beyers Naudé and Bram Fisher. In the light of some public responses to efforts to vindicate them, this account also shows the extent to which deeply seated prejudices still exist within sectors of society. This in turn serves as a challenge to those who wish to be guided by the legacy of justice and equality left by these two exceptional men. The question of exactly how crucial the criterion of the political affiliation of people like himself, Breyten Breytenbach, Van Zyl Slabbert and – one should surely add – Bram Fisher is in identifying oneself as an Afrikaner is one of the questions Oom Bey considered in an address in 1985 entitled “Being an Afrikaner and the Afrikaner’s Alternatives for the Future”. Unfortunately we do not have the complete address at our disposal, but

only the cryptic notes that Oom Bey made for it. Nevertheless, what makes these notes even more important for the purposes of this publication is that, besides the fact that Oom Bey here gives his own definition of what constitutes an Afrikaner, he was speaking to a gathering of the *Junior Rapportryers* and therefore to a young audience, and in the address sketches some possible future scenarios for South Africa. This he did in the light of the choice that faced white South Africans at the time between the homelands policy, gradual political reform, peaceful co-existence or emigration from South Africa.

The final contribution comes from Maria Ericson, who reflects on her visits to South Africa and her meeting with Beyers Naudé in 1996 while a doctoral student. She gives an account of this doctoral research in which she compared the situations in post-apartheid South Africa and in Northern Ireland with regard to the challenge of reconciliation. In it she specifically addressed the necessary processes that would “*bridge the divide* of negative attitudes, stereotypes and images held by people in a context of conflict – in order to build mutual trust and new relationships across their divisions” and would “*deal with the past* by healing the damage caused in the course of the conflict, looking at the needs of victimised persons and groups, as well as those of the perpetrators of violence, and seeking to build, restore or transform the relationship between them.” Ericson also emphasizes that for both these processes to succeed there is a need for “safe and challenging spaces.” Returning the focus to Beyers Naudé, she shows how he was also challenged in his life to “bridge the divide” and rose to it by his willingness to leave his own “safe space” and enter that of others and in his efforts to create similar opportunities for fellow South Africans.

We decided to let Oom Bey have the final word in the publication. It is with much gratitude to Dr Keith Clements that we are able to publish an interview he had with Oom Bey after Oom Bey had the privilege of experiencing some aspects of mainly the positive – but, alas, also of the negative – future, that he had foreseen, hoped for or warned against so many times in his career. We share with readers Dr Clements’s regret, communicated to us via e-mail, that “no transcription on paper, however verbally accurate, can adequately express that wonderful sense of thoughtfulness, conviction and humility which even his pauses and quietness of speech convey to the ear!” However, despite this shortcoming, we are pleased that this publication can end with Oom Bey’s words of warning against apathy and lack of concern, his words of gratitude for the privilege of living in a new South Africa, and his words of encouragement to face up to the challenges that this presents to us all today.

As always, a publication of the nature of *Oom Bey for the Future* is always a team effort. Running the risk of inadvertently leaving out someone, we would like to thank the following persons for making this volume possible. Firstly, we express our appreciation to all the contributors for their willingness to share their insights

on Oom Bey's witness and its ongoing relevance for our country and its people, especially its youth. On the technical side, we are grateful to Wikus van Zyl, publisher at AFRICAN SUN MeDIA for his work, advice and, above all, his patience in the compilation of this volume. Also, we want to offer a special word of gratitude to Dr Hans Snoek and Dr Bert Kling of *Kerkinactie/Global Ministries* of the United Protestant Church in the Netherlands, whose generous financial assistance made this publication possible. Finally, we would also like to thank everyone who, through their donations to the Beyers Naudé Archives, made these reflections and future encounters with Oom Bey possible. In this regard we would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Naudé family, especially to Tannie Ilse Naudé, who entrusted to the Beyers Naudé Archives a treasured collection of a lifetime of sermons, addresses and notes by Oom Bey.

*Len Hansen & Robert Vosloo*  
Stellenbosch, June 2006

## 1. Introduction

The title of this paper is taken from a description that Charles Villa-Vicencio gave of Beyers Naudé in the *festschrift* *Resistance and Hope. South African essays in honour of Beyers Naudé* (1985). He speaks of Naudé's remarkable ability to strike a balance between his evangelical roots and his sense of realism. Villa-Vicencio writes that, for Naudé, a person's understanding of the Scriptures ...

“... must be tested within a community of people of goodwill, including both Christians and those who care not to be known as such. It must be concretised in relation to ongoing political and economic analysis, and ultimately verified in a deeply personal inner conviction. [Naudé] is today at once a deeply spiritual and a profoundly secular person. ... His is a worldly Christianity, but one deeply grounded in a very traditional understanding of theological identity.” (Villa-Vicencio, 1985: 8, 13)

Being a ‘secular Christian’ refers here to this kind of social and historical awareness which is an integral aspect of one's spirituality. The question that I would like briefly to explore is the following: how did someone who came from a very traditional, Afrikaner background change to become this secular Christian that Beyers Naudé was?

## 2. Beyers Naudé's secular Christianity: possible sources

One possible answer to the above question might be found by referring to Naudé's particular family background. His father, Jozua Naudé, was also a freedom fighter of sorts, having fought side-by-side with the famous Boer general Christiaan Frederik Beyers against the British in the South African War (1899-1902). After the war Jozua decided to study theology at Stellenbosch. Upon completion of his theological training in 1909, he received calls from various congregations, but he chose to become superintendent of a work colony for poor *bywoners* (dispossessed white tenant farmers) in the then Orange Free State. This commitment to helping dispossessed Afrikaners, impoverished by the war, remained as strong as his anti-imperialist stance. These convictions were

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<sup>1</sup> Paper read at the mini-conference entitled “Oom Bey for the Future” hosted by the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Stellenbosch on 24 August 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Christoff Pauw is a doctoral student at the Faculty of Theology of the Free University of Amsterdam and a researcher at the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology.

instrumental in the founding of the *Afrikaner Broederbond* (AB), of which he was elected the first president in 1918.

Could his father's convictions give a clue to Beyers's own sense of resistance against injustice? Did he inherit from his father a pastoral heart for the downtrodden and dispossessed? This may be, but why then were there so few other Dutch Reformed ministers' sons who could relate a similar concern as the one that their parents' had for poor Afrikaners in the 1920s to the plight of poor blacks a generation later? On its own, this reason does not seem to provide sufficient cause for Beyers Naudé's decision to leave his congregation in 1963 and minister to the oppressed of apartheid. Other reasons must therefore be sought.

A second possibility may be the simple fact of Oom Bey's personality. Friends, colleagues and even critics have described Naudé as a very lovable and charismatic person with a grit-like determination in the fight for justice. His leadership capabilities had already proved strong at an early age – as *primarius* (head student) of the Wilgenhof residence at the University of Stellenbosch and chairperson of the University's Students' Representative Council – not to mention the fact that he was at one time the youngest member of the *Broederbond*. His devotion to principle – sometimes attributed to his Afrikaans culture – is often cited as one of his most prominent characteristics. One can agree that his personality was decisive for his very influential role in the struggle against apartheid. But even so, personality as such does not explain the bold steps that he took – otherwise why were there so few other head students of Wilgenhof and ex-*Broederbonders* in the struggle?

Therefore, an even more decisive source must be sought for Oom Bey's secular Christianity. Some of the various other possibilities are his character and virtues, specific influential role models in his life, or mere historical coincidence. An interesting route to take might also be to explore Beyers Naudé's theological identity. The renowned South African theologian David Bosch once identified three theological currents that had fed into Afrikaner religion and particularly in the DRC (1984: 25-32). An understanding of Naudé's position with regard to these three currents might throw some light on his particular religious identity.

### *2.1 Beyers Naudé's theological identity*

The three major forces that shaped Afrikaner civil religion between the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century that Bosch identified were, firstly, Reformed evangelicalism (as introduced by Andrew Murray, Jr.), secondly, Kuyperian neo-Calvinism, and, thirdly, neo-Fichtean romantic nationalism. The first was the oldest, whereas the influence of neo-Calvinism and German Romanticism was only really felt by the 1930s and 1940s. The latter influences coincided with the rise of Afrikaner nationalism, which had accelerated after the defeat against the British and the subsequent restoration of Afrikaner power in 1910 with the formation of the



Union of South Africa. Young Afrikaners who had studied in the Netherlands and Germany after the 1930s were influenced by Kuyparian concepts of creation ordinances (the nation was one such ordinance and, therefore, needed to be preserved) and the National Socialist emphasis on the purity of the ethnic nation. These ideas contributed to Afrikaner nationalism and racial differentiation in South Africa.

However, of special interest here is the oldest of the three influencing forces, the oldest of the theological currents, that Bosch describes, namely Reformed evangelicalism. When the Cape came under British rule at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Scottish ministers were imported to replace Dutch ministers in the DRC. The evangelical piety that they brought with them was “immensely strengthened by a series of evangelistic revivals that swept the Cape Colony in the 1860s” (Bosch, 1984: 25), inspired to a large extent by the fervour of Andrew Murray Jr. Although this piety stimulated renewed interest in mission work in the DRC, its other-worldly, personalistic spirituality did not focus much attention on the social conditions of others. Evangelicalism remained very strong in the DRC – as it does to this day. It is interesting to note that Bosch maintained in his 1984 publication that orthodox evangelical piety provided a “negative preparation for Afrikaner civil religion” by drawing attention away from the believer’s ‘horizontal’ relationships to the believer’s ‘vertical’ relationship with God (Bosch, 1984: 26). Yet, in his contribution to the 1985 *festschrift* to Beyers Naudé mentioned above, he writes that Naudé and the younger theologians of the 1950s and 1960s who opposed apartheid came from the evangelical tradition (Bosch, 1985: 68).

Jaap Durand, in the same volume, explained this almost paradoxical situation in a brilliant essay on Afrikaner dissent. He writes that, for obvious reasons, no dissidents against apartheid emerged from the neo-Calvinist and nationalist theological currents. In the evangelical current he distinguishes between three groups by the turn of the century – “a smaller, more pietistic and revivalistic group, a bigger group that was less revivalistic but nevertheless evangelistic in its approach, and, thirdly, a group that actually cut across the first two groups, comprising a substantial number of ministers and church members who took the missionary calling of the church seriously” (1985: 43). For the first group, the vertical relationship with God indeed prohibited much interest in social matters, whereas those in the second group largely aligned themselves with the idea of a *volkskerk* or national church, where social concern was limited to their own group.

It was, therefore, only from the ranks of the third evangelical group where, according to Durand, the “missionary spirit of Van Lier and De Vos”<sup>3</sup> was still

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<sup>3</sup> The Rev. Helperus Ritzema van Lier (1764-1793) and Rev. Michiel Christiaan Vos (1759-1825) were Dutch ministers at the Cape who had been strongly influenced by the pietism of the so-called *Nadere Reformatie* (Second Reformation) in the Netherlands. They served in the Cape during the

alive, that dissent against apartheid arose. The ambiguity of Reformed evangelical piety lies in the fact that its missionary orientation (despite its at times paternalistic undertones) forced Christians to confront social matters. Their missionary orientation and adherence to the gospel cultivated in them a deep concern for the welfare of others. When they had to respond to these matters, they were also reluctant simply to apply Scriptural principles, as the 'vertical' and 'horizontal' spheres were to remain distinct. They, therefore, sought answers that would respond to the real problem at hand, rather than timeless principles. Durand explains:

"The pietist's response to [social, cultural and educational] problems was usually a *practical* one, because his [*sic*] type of 'vertical' spirituality kept him [*sic*] from going to Scriptures too readily to find a normative answer to problems outside the religious sphere. ... [The] weakness of pietism can also be its greatest strength in a situation of social development and change. The pietist will be less likely to justify his social actions by an appeal to unchanging biblical principles or to use the historical situation in which he finds himself as a grid for biblical interpretation." (1985: 48-49)

The result of the above was, therefore, that those from this third group in the evangelical-pietist tradition, as identified by Durand, gained a greater awareness of history and society, and the forces that shape them. To this group belonged Johannes du Plessis, with whom Naudé sympathised, BB Keet, one of Naudé's professors at the Seminary at Stellenbosch, and BJ Marais, a contemporary of Naudé. He found their views appealing largely because he had been shaped by the same tradition: an evangelical piety coupled with a missionary spirit that extended beyond ethnic boundaries. Whereas a number of young theologians of the 1950s and 1960s shared this vision, Beyers Naudé was probably its most shining proponent. In him, to again quote Durand (1985: 49), "the realisation that the social and political implications of the gospel transcend the narrow confines of self-interest, and embrace all people" was most forcibly present. Thus, when one approaches Naudé's biography from this perspective, his decision to resign from his position in the DRC and to head the *Christian Institute* in 1963 begins to make sense.

## *2.2 Specific events in Beyers Naudé's life*

A number of specific and important events also took place in Naudé's life during the 1950s that would shape his eventual stance against apartheid. By then he was a student pastor in Pretoria. The first of these important experiences was an

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late 1700s and brought with them the revivalism typical of pietism. Their missionary zeal extended to ministry to slaves, often to the dismay of the white colonists.

extensive six-month overseas study tour to Europe and North America as chairperson of the *Kerkjeugvereniging*, a Christian youth body that he had helped to establish. The aim of the study tour was to gather ideas for youth work. However, once abroad, wherever he went people questioned him about the political situation in South Africa. Initially Naudé tried to defend apartheid, but soon realised that his theological arguments were flawed and easily refuted. He realised that apartheid could not be justified by Scripture. These doubts about apartheid never left him and after he had read BB Keet's short 1955 book *Whither South Africa?* (in which the biblical justification for apartheid was also powerfully challenged), he was determined to continue his search for clarity on this issue.

By 1958 Naudé had been elected as *assessor* or vice chairman of the Transvaal Synod of the DRC. Young ministers who, as students, had known him during his time as student chaplain in Pretoria felt encouraged to come and seek his advice regarding their own reservations about apartheid. Thus, Naudé came to hear of the problems and frustrations of black communities via the testimonies of missionaries, such as Chris Greyling, Francois Malan, Charl le Roux and Gert Swart, who worked in these communities.

"They told me about the problems they were experiencing and about the growing resistance of African, coloured and Indian Christians to the stand the white NGK [DRC] was taking on apartheid. These people were challenging the white ministers by saying, 'How do you justify what is happening to us on the basis of Scripture?' The ministers invited me to come and share their experiences with them. And when they told me what they were experiencing, I said to them: 'I have to accept that you are telling me the truth, but I cannot believe it.' And so they invited me to come and look for myself. And I did. And what I found was a shattering experience." (Naudé in Ryan, 1990: 47)

Naudé went on four or five visits to segregated Indian townships, to black mining compounds and to coloured slum neighbourhoods, experiencing the awful division, strife and hardship that apartheid had brought to people's lives. He told himself, "If this is what apartheid is all about, it is evil, it is inhuman, it is something which can never be supported." (*Ibid.*, 48) He visited the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) and for the first time studied the apartheid race laws. "It brought me to the conclusion, not only on theological grounds, but also on practical grounds, on the grounds of justice, these laws were even less acceptable" (*Ibid.*).

If critical voices from within the DRC were tolerated in the fifties, this was brought to an abrupt end after the Cottesloe Consultation of 1960, which followed in the aftermath of the Sharpeville massacre. Although the conference statement

was moderate in its criticism of apartheid, it was vehemently rejected in the Afrikaans press and by the Prime Minister at the time, HF Verwoerd. The April 1961 meeting of the Transvaal Synod univocally condemned Cottesloe. The Cottesloe delegates, of whom Naudé was one, were summoned to the front of the hall where the synod assembled and were asked to give reasons for their support of the Cottesloe declaration. Of the six responses five were apologetic or even openly critical towards Cottesloe. Beyers Naudé saw this as a turning point in his life:

“I had to decide – would I because of pressure, political pressure and other pressures which were being exercised, give in and accept, or would I stand by my convictions which over a period of years had become rooted in me as firm and holy Christian convictions? I decided on the latter course ... I could not see my way clear to giving way on a single one of [the Cottesloe] resolutions, because I was convinced that they were in accordance with the truth of the gospel.”  
(in Ryan, 1990: 66)

From this point onwards Naudé would not look back. He founded the journal *Pro Veritate* and discussed setting up an ecumenical body with a number of friends in various churches. Thus the Christian Institute was formed in 1963. The impact that this body had in the church struggle in South Africa cannot be over-emphasised – not least of all because it was motivated and driven by a theological identity that placed the secular claims of the gospel on an equal footing with its spiritual claims, no matter the cost. In his famous sermon to his Aasvoëlkop congregation in 1963, where he explained his decision to head the Christian Institute, he stated that “it is better to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:27). He could just as well have used the great commandment of Matthew 22:37-39 as his sermon text: “to love God and to love your neighbour” – or, “to love God *is* to love your neighbour!”

### 3. Conclusion

Naudé’s secular Christianity points to a remarkable balance between a spirituality that was firmly rooted in the gospel, on the one hand, and a critical awareness of the social forces that shape people’s lives, on the other. All too often this balance seems to be lost. Today, young people who feel themselves drawn to the claims of the gospel often find themselves confronted by a Pentecostal form of evangelicalism where the emphasis is solely on one’s vertical relationship with God. The result is sometimes a form of anti-intellectualism that eschews critical social analysis and attempts to construct a simple, binary social reality wherein the Bible guides clearly and unambiguously. One simply needs to listen to the Word as it is preached and take this at face value without much further inquiry.

Those who do wish to inquire further and who do see merit in the modern scientific worldview and historical awareness – and with it an awareness of the contextuality of Scripture and of the historical and temporal distance between ourselves and Jesus of Nazareth or Moses – are often then left with a choice between relativistic forms of spirituality (sometimes referred to as new ageism) or agnosticism. Here the claims of the gospel of Christ are diminished and replaced with secular claims. These claims are not necessarily bad, but they are driven by instrumentalism (often as instruments for self-empowerment) rather than being understood as ways to obey and glorify God.

The remarkable example that the life of Beyers Naudé provides here is of a person with a keen social awareness coupled with a desire to “obey God rather than men.” He did not shy away from engaging with the socio-political realities of his time. Yet, this did not estrange him from his evangelical sense of spirituality. On the contrary, one might argue that this was precisely born from an evangelicalism that could interpret the social and historical implications of the claims of the gospel. His attempts to understand the social, political and economic forces that shape reality were ways to better carry out the claims of the gospel, even if this was not the easy route to follow. For young persons today who struggle with the confusing choice between anti-intellectualism and relativism, Oom Bey’s life points to a way by which to engage life in a way that will help us to be Christ for others.

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Beyers Naudé

We stand on the threshold of the fourth century,<sup>2</sup> on the boundary of a land of promise. In front of us this fatherland stretches itself out. I do not mean the land that is our home, but the land of our future, the land of our youth.

We as Christian youth stand in a special relationship with regard to this future – different from those who are not Christians, because the future holds in store for us not only the destinies of a single nation, but the vital principle for the flourishing of all nations. Because we, as Christian youth, are not only building a nation – we are building above all a Church and the Kingdom. And this Kingdom is not being built with land and grain, with dynamite and uranium, but with materials that will never perish!

At the gates of this Kingdom, this eternal land of promise, as I see it, there are three pillars of granite on which the whole structure rests ... 1) Calling; 2) Attitude; 3) Faith.

#### I. Calling

The highest inspiration for the youth of every generation does not consist in the call: “Back to the old ways!”, but rather in the challenge: “We are building a new way!” However, for this a vision a grand vision of our time and future is necessary. That vision must come from God. Otherwise it is an illusion! What vision does God want to give to the Christian youth of our Church and country at this time?

Forget for the moment this site of celebration. Lift your eyes up towards the far, wide-open spaces of our fatherland – yes, even further than that – towards the continent of Africa. What do you see? Do you not see in the fields of the Lord...a small number of workers bent under the weight of the burden? Do you not see in the fields of poor-relief the need for bread, the thirst for compassion and the hunger for love? Do you not see in the fields of the gospel those whose appetites for material things and pleasure have been satisfied, but whose souls are calling out: “I am dying of hunger!”? Do you not see, with and alongside you, many young people who have never experienced the wonder of the reality of Christ Jesus in their lives?

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<sup>1</sup> Translation of an unpublished address delivered at a gathering of the *Kerk Jeugvereniging* (Church Youth Society) in Pretoria on 23 March 1952.

<sup>2</sup> Referring to the three hundred years of white presence in South Africa – eds.

These are the vistas ... And with such vistas the consciousness of one's calling, the compulsion placed upon you from on High, grows – not just to see and recognise, but to experience the vision of God's Spirit in my heart where God takes possession of my youth when He asks, "Whom shall I send? And who will go?" ... and then to incline your heart and your head when you say, "Here am I – send me!"

## II. Attitude

All the problems of our country force us to recognise the urgency and necessity to come to the right insight regarding our convictions by way study, research and prayer. As never before, young Christians ought to be at the forefront of the search for and proclamation of the truth. But, behind the insight must be the right attitude, behind the sacred principles also sacred motives, as there always is an invisible motivating force behind the visible. Surely, the struggle of our Christian youth is as much one of Christian attitude as one of Christian principles! If we want to achieve something lasting, something grand in the building of a nation, we must first of all begin by building our attitudes, our mutual human relationships.

You know all too well how the conflicts of the past have created bitterness, fear and distrust. How they fuelled the desire for revenge and resulted in alienation. I also know all too well that you can rightfully point at the unchristian attitudes of others – this I acknowledge. But this is exactly why we as Christian youth are called to be more magnanimous than those others, whomever they might be, who reveal the wrong attitude. Therefore these are challenges to you. The following attitudes should be yours. We need:

... to uphold the truth of our convictions;  
... honesty that confesses our own guilt;  
... love that conquers all hatred – with a cross!

The question [we should put to ourselves is]: What is the language of our young hearts? [Our] [a]nswer [should be], in the words of the prayer of David<sup>3</sup>, "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" Only then will we enter the land of promise!

## III. Faith

Calling and attitude mean nothing without the certainty of faith that we have a message for our time, a message that is for all people and that is a word of liberation and salvation for all people. This message must take possession of the

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<sup>3</sup> Notes unclear; probable reference to Ps. 139: 23-24 – eds.

hearts of people, must forcefully change lives, it must transform defeats into victories! I know only one such message: that of Christ Jesus! I know of only one person who made this message a reality: Christ Jesus! I know of only one faith that accomplishes these things: faith in Christ Jesus! I know of only one future for a nation: a future built on this foundation!

The past three centuries belonged to our forefathers, our ancestors. The fourth century belongs to us, their children, their descendents. To us, the youth of our Church and our country is granted the possession of this land of promise, but only when God has taken possession of us! A nation is built through its nascent generations, but only when every generation can confess: Lord for ever and ever!



# OOM BEY AND THE YOUTH: THREE CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

Len Hansen<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction

In line with one of the primary objectives of the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology, namely to promote the ongoing reflection on the message and legacy of Beyers Naudé and thereby to keep them alive, this article addresses the question of the relevance of his life and work for the future of South Africa with specific reference to the *youth* of South Africa – many of whom never knew him or might not even know *of* him. By looking at his writings and his example during actual events in his lifetime, this article will identify three challenges to which Beyers Naudé rose: to see, to judge and to act, in that order. Although these challenges are applicable to all South Africans today, the way that Oom Bey confronted and still confronts the *youth* of today with these same challenges will be the focus here.

## 2. The life and thought of Beyers Naudé: three challenges

### 2.1 The challenge to see

Beyers Naudé's struggle against apartheid started by his "simple" exposure to, his "seeing", the consequences of apartheid in the lives of black South Africans.<sup>2</sup> He described one of the first instances of injustice that he had "seen" and which caused him unease. It happened during the first years of his ministry as a young assistant pastor in Wellington and had to do with the racial separation among churches in the Dutch Reformed family. In a chapter called "Saadjies van twyfel" (Seeds of doubt) in his autobiography, Naudé recalls how he came to realise that prospective ministers in the "coloured" Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) received second-rate training in Wellington when compared to what was offered prospective DRC (white) ministers at the seminary at the University of Stellenbosch. This unfair practice, coupled with the deeply seated feeling of inferiority ("diepliggende minderwaardigheidsgevoel") as "second-class ministers for second-class people" that he noticed among the DRMC ministers, led him to pose a much more fundamental theological question for the first time: why does

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<sup>2</sup> Naudé is perhaps primarily associated with the struggle in South Africa against *political* oppression. However, he also was conscious of, and made the world attend to, the factual relationship between political and socio-economic injustice and hardships in South Africa. (Cf. Naudé, 1977a: 5, where he identifies – in this order – two of the most pressing issues facing the country as "the issue of growing unemployment, poverty and want", and, secondly, "the struggle for political liberation". Cf. also Naudé, 1984: 3 and 1976a: 1-7.)

the DRC have two separate worship services, one for whites and one for coloureds, while both adhere to the same articles of faith, follow almost exactly the same liturgy and do so in the same language, Afrikaans? (Naudé, 1995: 33ff). However, it was years later before he really “saw” the effects of the injustice of apartheid. This resulted from his being exposed to it in a such a heart-rending and life-changing way that Beyers Naudé was left committed to the cause of the oppressed. At the time he was minister in Potchefstroom after serving as student chaplain at DRC Pretoria East for a period. In a televised interview with Dorothee Sölle for IKON Television in the Netherlands on 20 June 1985, Naudé listed three reasons for his “conversion” to the struggle for liberation in South Africa, one being:

“[A]s acting Moderator of the Transvaal Synod ... young ministers – white ministers – who were serving African and coloured and Indian congregations – came to me with the problems which they were experiencing within their own congregations, the painful experiences of their own people with what apartheid laws were doing to them. And when they came to me and described what they themselves had experienced, I could not believe it ... and I said to them: ‘It’s impossible, it can’t be.’ And they invited me to go to their congregations, which I did. I met with their church councils, I met with members of the congregation, I met with families who were deeply divided because, for instance, of the mixed marriages act, and the group areas act, and I was shattered. It was an experience which led me to the situation of being totally lost”. (*Hope for Faith*, 5-6)

After this initial exposure to the life of blacks living under apartheid in the townships of Bosmont and Fordsburg and that of the migrant workers in the mine compound of Crown Mines, and realising its effect on him, Naudé became convinced that all white South Africans needed similar exposure if they were to see the error of their government’s ways and were to play a role in liberating black South Africa. However, he knew from his own experience just how completely isolated the majority of whites were from life in the townships and the daily hardships of its inhabitants, for:

“apartheid was extremely successful in separating white and non-white in South Africa, not only geographically but also spiritually; apartheid so effectively divided us that, as a white, you could go through your whole life without really knowing what the majority of your fellow South Africans experience and think and feel”. (1995: 44; my translation – LDH)

Given the improbability of the direct exposure of white South Africans to these conditions, it became a lifelong goal of Naudé’s to expose these conditions to them

and indeed to the whole world. Whenever he had the opportunity he would recount the deplorable state of justice and equality and the hardships of township life to those outside it, trying to make white South Africans aware of their ignorance – and that they needed to be freed from it for their own sakes as much as for the sake of the country as a whole.<sup>3</sup> To give a full account here of the times he tried to do this is, of course, impossible. One or two examples will have to suffice. In an address to The Royal Institute of International Affairs on 16 December 1975 (read on his behalf, as the government denied him permission to leave the country) Naudé remarked on the government's policy of separate development, calling it "the Balkanisation of South Africa":

"The success of this policy is dependent upon the implementation of this policy to such a degree that the large majority of the 17,5 million Africans should be established in these independent states ... [T]here is no doubt that the efforts of the Government to sell this policy on both ideological and practical grounds has had a tremendous psychological effect on the whole population of our country. In white circles, especially those of the Afrikaners, ethnic and cultural separateness is today regarded as of greater importance than human togetherness; national and racial identity of greater importance than communal sharing and responsibility; racial security and 'salvation' to be found in moving, living and being apart instead of being and living together in a world where man's common destiny requires this to an increased degree. On the African side, this policy has created confusion, frustration, anger, bitterness and even desperation". (1975: 6)<sup>4</sup>

Reflecting on South Africa's unjust economic dispensation, Naudé remarked to the *Belydendekring* in Johannesburg on 8 December 1984,

"... the whole issue of riches and poverty, of wages and unemployment, of relationship between management and labourer, of worker rights and responsibilities are all part of the Christian

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<sup>3</sup> In his interview with Dorothee Sölle, commenting on her observation that many Germans claimed to have had no knowledge of the Holocaust during World War II, Naudé remarked, "You remind me of one of the most painful aspects of our life in South Africa: we do not know" (*Hope for Faith*, 9). Cf. also Naudé referring to the recent death in detention of Steve Biko, famous in South African black political circles: "My dilemma is, however, that I have to speak to a white or predominantly white audience about a South African of whom 90% of white South Africans know little or nothing" (2005: 77).

<sup>4</sup> In the interview with Sölle he summarised the effect of this policy on black South Africans as the forced removal of "three and a half million people from their land, from where they live, from where they had settled down, from where they are happy as a community, force them into arid, remote areas where the possibility of livelihood, of income, of existence is in fact so small that for all practical purposes it is a process of slow death which they are facing ..." (*Hope for Faith*, 9).

witness which we need to understand and to address ourselves to. South Africa finds itself in the unique position of being, on the one hand, a clear representative of the First World (economically privileged, highly industrialized, technologically far advanced, white minority dominated) and being at the same time part of the Third World (underdeveloped, impoverished, exploited and oppressed in many respects) ... addressing these economic discrepancies will require a confession of the Churches' lack of interest and involvement in the struggle of millions of people for basic rights, income, conditions of employment, and expressions of the dignity of human labour." (1984: 2)

In a final example, from an address at the University of Cape Town in 1976, Naudé again lists some of the realities of injustice and inequality in South Africa at the time: it was a country requiring "ever-increasing frightening powers of security ... which claims to protect the rights and safety of the majority, but which in fact imposes the political and military control of the minority over a large majority"; a country under the homeland system that "could eventually leave 16 million Blacks living in South Africa as stateless citizens by the year 2000 ... increasing already existing deep frustration, bitterness and growing polarization between black and white ... where [there exists] an ever-increasing system of control over the freedom of the press, over censorship of publications, over the right of every individual to express through responsible protest his or her legitimate opinion of concern and disagreement ... where the ownership of land, economic wealth, the social privileges and educational opportunities are owned, enjoyed, controlled or decided upon by an elite or a race or class in favour of the few to the detriment of the majority ..." (1976b: 2-3).

Allan Boesak recalls receiving exactly the same advice – this need to be informed, to see the realities of oppression – from Oom Bey when the former started questioning the theological reasoning behind the DRC's support of apartheid to which he was exposed at the seminary of the DRMC at the University of the Western Cape. Boesak recounts, "He told me: fundamentally, these are the basic truths on which you have to stand – *that which you see around you*. What they teach you at that theological seminary down in Bellville, what they make you read, what they make you believe, is not important" (2005:134; emphasis added – LDH). The need to see and to be informed, not only by your own eyes and experiences, but also – and perhaps especially – through the eyes and the experiences of the victims of oppression, remained with Beyers Naudé all through his life. Even during the years when he was under house arrest he remain informed, reading six newspapers daily as well as almost every book of a political nature he could lay his hands on! (Heaney, 2004: 196; *Vaderland*, 29 October 1982). His consciousness of the dehumanising results of apartheid also greatly increased with his growing

ecumenical exposure through the work of the CI. It is in this context of ecumenism and the importance of “seeing” reality that De Gruchy quotes Oom Bey as saying:

“Without the united church or the united standing of the Christian community there is no possibility of making any impact on the world with regard to our message or our mission. It is the mission of the whole church to the whole world, not of one church to a small number of people around them. *The church has to look at the needs of the world and say: If we are truly the people of God proclaiming the gospel of salvation and liberation, the transforming of human beings in society, then the church must be one.*” (De Gruchy, 2005: 83; my emphasis – LDH)

Of course, seeing or being aware of the realities of injustice was not enough. As a Christian, a minister, a pastor, Naudé knew that his critique of the system could not be divorced from his faith. Also, because his own church had so long justified the ideology of apartheid on theological grounds, his critique of it had to do this as well. To do that, he had to return to the Bible.

## 2.2 *The challenge to judge*

In his autobiography Beyers Naudé tells of his struggle with the Word of God on the issue of race and his church’s interpretation of this. Margaret Nash (2005: 34) quotes him saying that he realised that “I’ve got to educate myself on the Bible, the church, the place of race in the Bible.” So, Nash continues, “[f]or years he concentrated on educating himself ... He took advantage of [among other things] the meeting in Potchefstroom of the World Reformed Ecumenical Synod and studied with the *Doppers*, the *Gereformeerde Kerk* (Reformed Church). He was becoming theologically much better educated.”<sup>5</sup> In his autobiography Naudé also lists specific passages of Scripture, central to the DRC’s biblical justification of apartheid that he grappled with:<sup>6</sup> the story and true meaning of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9; Deuteronomy 32:8-9, on “the boundaries for the peoples” set by God; the account of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:5-11; and Paul’s speech on the Areopagus declaring that God “made every nation of men ... and he determined ... the exact places they should live” (Ac. 17:26). Other important passages he had to come to terms with at the time were those on how we should

<sup>5</sup> Cf. also Naudé’s sermon at the induction service of GJ Swart at the Aasvoëlkop congregation on 13 August 1960. The theme of the sermon, “Die Boodschap van Ons Tyd” (The Message of Our Time) revolved around the importance of judging the world by the Word of God. Interestingly, one explicit example listed by Naudé is the need to judge “die wêreld van ras en kleur” (the world of race and colour) in the light of Scripture.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. also *Pro Veritate*, June 1974, p. 21-3, for an address delivered to DATUM 80 (an open forum for discussing current issues in the country) in Pretoria on 18 April 1974, in which Naudé attacked the theological justification of the policy of separate development on the grounds that these five passages of Scripture had been interpreted erroneously.

treat the foreigners in our midst (Lev. 19:33; Isa. 5:3, 6; Mk. 11:17), the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:1-42), Jesus' prayer for unity in the Church (Jn. 17:20-23), Paul's condemnation of Peter for his attitude towards non-Jews (Gal. 2:11-21; 3:28), the breaking down of the wall of separation (Eph. 2:11-22), and the true meaning of circumcision (Php. 3:1-11) (1995: 41-42).

Naudé came to the conclusion that there was indeed no biblical justification for apartheid. And, just as was the case with the realities regarding the injustices of apartheid, he also believed that Afrikaners were living in ignorance of the true meaning of Scripture and had been exposed to an incorrect interpretation of its message on issues of race. Therefore, again he took it upon himself to reveal this to them, using any forum available, his sermons being the most important. It is also in his sermons that one can see with striking clarity how important faith and the Bible were to Beyers Naudé in the liberation of South Africans from oppression. Again a few examples will have to suffice.

His sermon "Obedience to God", on Acts 5:17-42, was delivered in his own congregation, Aasvoëlkop in Johannesburg, on 22 September 1963 – when he announced his decision to take up the directorship of the CI. In this, probably the best-known and most quoted of his sermons, he set out the relationship between the decision that had changed his life forever and his view of the Bible:

"I have tried to find guidance for my own decision in other passages of Scripture, and I have tried to find reasons which would enable me to sever my connection with *Pro Veritate* [the monthly magazine of the CI, of which he was the editor] and the Christian Institute and continue peacefully and happily with my pastoral work. But time and again – sometimes with great conflict, fear and resistance in my heart – the Lord brought me back to this passage of Scripture, as if to say: whatever this text may mean for others, this is my answer for you: obey God rather than man!" (n.d.: 6-7).

In his farewell sermon at Aasvoëlkop, entitled "Flame of Fire and Sledgehammer," on Jeremiah 23:9-32, he reiterated the importance of God's Word for our political actions:

"... the Word of God invades our private lives, addresses us, compels us to answer, in exactly those areas of our life which we so scrupulously try to hide and conceal ... It is then that the Word comes to us in all its sharpness as a double-edged sword ... judging the thoughts and motives of the heart and laying bare the deepest and most secret motives of our life! ... [D]oes not God use his Word to bring all the pleasant forms and customs of the Church, all our human systems and relationships, all our social grandeur and traditions under the testing fire, under the sledgehammer of his

judgment? Does not God, sometimes in a moment, break down the walls which we human beings have so nicely built up in our own wisdom over the years? Do we not often have to watch with shame as the fire of God consumes our handiwork ... and sends it up in smoke? God must break us before he can build. And also in the life of our community: is it not this power and wonder of the Word, that it continually reconciles, recreates, renews? That God offers his Word to each community, each group, each nation, and country, as the light of their life, the hope of their existence, the power for their struggle?" (n.d.: 13-14).

We have seen how Beyers Naudé in his response to the situation in South Africa moved from "seeing" it and committing himself to righting it towards judging it in the light of God's Word.<sup>7</sup> This, too, was a challenge he set for all he met. Allan Boesak comments on this characteristic of Oom Bey:

"Beyers Naudé confronted you with choices. I do not know whether there is any person who, having had the privilege of meeting this man, of talking with him, who did not find that all of a sudden *they* were confronted with choices that they would rather not have wanted to make ... [O]nce you have met him, and once you did open your mind and your heart to him and to what he said to you as you spoke with him, you found that you had to make some serious choices about yourself, your ministry, your understanding of others and about the issues of justice and peace. You had to make choices about apartheid, the church, and about the world in which we live, and ultimately, about the gospel ... And those were the choices that would haunt you until the issues that you knew confronted you were resolved" (2005: 134).<sup>8</sup>

On the duty to judge, to make choices, Beyers Naudé would concur. The comment that *he* was the source of that challenge he probably would rephrase as he did in his parting words to his congregation in 1963:

"What is of the utmost importance is that you should realize that God is summoning you through recent events. Let Christ take hold of you, Christ the living Word, let your thoughts and decisions be determined above all by him, the Word; let the future of your church,

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<sup>7</sup> Besides the Bible, his most important source, Naudé also used other means to address his ignorance about the issue of racial discrimination, e.g. his visits to the South African Institute of Race Relations to study the apartheid laws. "It brought me to the conclusion, not only on theological grounds, but also on practical grounds, on the grounds of justice, these laws were even less acceptable" (in Ryan 1990: 48).

<sup>8</sup> For a similar example of an appeal to choose, cf. Naudé, 1977b: 14.

your people and your country be decided by him, the only living Word" (n.d.: 19).

Finally, one sees in Beyers Naudé's career that this process of reflecting on the implications of God's Word for the situation in his country was not a once-off event limited to his initial soul- (and Scripture-)searching commitment to the liberation of the oppressed. In fact, years after this initial confrontation, while he was under house arrest (1977-1982), Oom Bey listed reasons why these "seven lean years" were among the most fruitful of his life. One reason was that this period gave him the opportunity to reflect further, on his own as well as with his stream of visitors from different church and racial backgrounds, on the meaning of the Bible for the unjust situation in the South Africa (Heaney, 2004: 195).<sup>9</sup> This also is in accordance with the testimony of many people who met and knew Naudé that he was always willing to listen, always ready to talk about his own views on both Bible and society (cf. Heaney, *ibid.*; De Gruchy, 2005: 83). Oom Bey, in this regard, even admitted to having learnt much from youthful South African voices, especially from among the oppressed.<sup>10</sup>

### *2.3. The challenge to act*

No detailed argument has to be made for the fact that Beyers Naudé was a man of action. His life story is one of extraordinary acts of courage in, and commitment to, the fight against oppression. One of his actions that caused much comment was his refusal to recant his support for the Cottesloe resolutions of 1960, the only one of the DRC delegates to the Cottesloe Consultation to do this in defiance of the request by their synod – that of the Transvaal – to recant when they appeared before it (Naudé, 1995: 48ff, 54ff).<sup>11</sup> In his inaugural address as Director of the CI Naudé, speaking on the importance of reconciliation, again stressed the importance of going beyond words:

"... all talk of reconciliation remains meaningless and even becomes dangerous if words are not transformed into deeds ... Do we realize that our confession of faith becomes nothing but cheap talk, yes,

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<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note that the CI evolved from the *Bible study groups* (initially restricted to DRC ministers but soon joined by black and coloured ministers from other denominations as well) that Naudé had founded in the beginning of the 1960s (Pauw 2005: 13).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Hope for Faith*, 30.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Naudé in Ryan (1990: 66): "I had to decide – would I because of pressure, political pressure and other pressures which were being exercised, give in and accept, or would I stand by my convictions which over a period of years had become rooted in me as firm and holy Christian convictions? I decided on the latter course ... I could not see my way clear to giving way on a single one of [the Cottesloe] resolutions, because I was convinced that they were in accordance with the truth of the gospel."



becomes an act of hypocrisy if we do not fully accept and enact the reconciliation of God in our lives?" (n.d.: 22-23).

De Gruchy (2005: 88) also recalls a conference on racism, organised by the SACC, at Hammanskraal in 1974, where:

"Beyers and Doug Bax proposed a *resolution on conscientious objection*, which was subsequently adopted. The reason for this was, as Beyers and Doug said at the time, we had to do *something*. The situation in the country, the deterioration and the violence, was such that the only way that young white Christians – and not only young ones – could signal their opposition to the militarization of South Africa, to the war that was taking place, to the violence in the townships was through conscientious objection to military service."

This need to "do something" is also reflected in Naudé's leadership of the CI, which engaged in practical action to fight apartheid and improve the circumstances of its victims.<sup>12</sup> Examples are: the CI undertook a joint venture with the South African Council of Churches that resulted in the *Message to the People of South Africa*, a declaration that identified apartheid as a false gospel, a false ideology, and called upon everyone in South Africa to reject it unequivocally ((De Gruchy, 2005: 83); the CI assisted the African Independent Churches to establish a Bible school to improve the theological training of its ministers in the 1960s, and launched and developed a programme of correspondence courses for Bible study; the CI was behind the formation of SPROCAS I (Study Projects on Christianity in an Apartheid Society) – six independent commissions composed of 130 South African theologians, educators, health workers, sociologists and economists of all races who analysed the changes needed in a post-apartheid era. Margaret Nash (2005: 37) tells that in the process many *ad hoc* publications were issued and much educational work was done, and that it also led to the establishment of Ravan Press. SPROCAS II translated the controversial theory of SPROCAS I into action. "It [SPROCAS II] was comprised of two elements. One was the Black Community Programmes which built on the Black Consciousness Movement and facilitated grassroots work in literacy, health, job creation, etc. ... The second element was a White Consciousness of Values Programme that attempted to help white South Africans to reflect on their lives and attitudes and to change direction ... It was soon followed by a Programme for Social Change" (Nash, *ibid.*; cf. Naudé, 1995: 105-6).

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<sup>12</sup> It is interesting to note in this regard that Ferm quotes Holmes and Young as saying, "On a theological level, the Institute had an impact in southern Africa similar to that of liberation theology in Latin America, which challenges Christians to accept the scriptural injunction to work and be with the poor ... The real threat posed by the Christian Institute lay not in its calls for some reforms, but in its call for truly radical change – at the roots of society" (1986: 63).

Despite his life as political activist and spokesperson for the oppressed, Naudé also remained a pastor at heart. When he was under house arrest for seven years this characteristic of Oom Bey was the one he could continue practising, even if only within the boundaries of his home. De Gruchy (2005: 89) calls him the “pastor of pastors” to whose house, during these seven years, “people made pilgrimages to talk to him ... Even in his enforced silence Beyers spoke as a pastor but also as prophet, as people came to discuss issues with him ...”<sup>13</sup> Even at the age of eighty Oom Bey remained committed to acting on his convictions. Asked by Charles Villa-Vicencio what his plans for the future were, he listed finishing his autobiography, the “winding down” of his office, and: “Next year I want to find some other small way of serving the cause of the poor. That is the least I can do.” Villa-Vicencio wrote that Oom Bey, seeing his expression, responded, “No, that does not mean the old man is going to start all over again!” He continued, “There is a sparkle in Oom Bey’s eye. The will ‘to do’ is still there” (1995:31).

Beyers Naudé also knew all about staying committed in the face of adversity.<sup>14</sup> He was ostracised by his own community and constantly subjected to surveillance by the security forces;<sup>15</sup> the harassment of his family, colleagues and friends added to his worries;<sup>16</sup> the CI and himself were violently attacked in the media;<sup>17</sup> on more than one occasion his passport was confiscated or he was refused permission to leave the country on his crusade against apartheid.<sup>18</sup> Finally, in February 1972, because it was suspected of being an “afflicted organisation”, the offices of his beloved CI were raided, its documents were confiscated, and along with other organisations it was subjected to an investigation by the Schlebusch-Le Grange Commission. Naudé’s refusal to testify before the Commission led to him being prosecuted and jailed. This investigation resulted in the banning of the CI and its mouthpiece, *Pro Veritate* – and eventually to Naudé’s own restriction between 1977

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Naudé, CFB: “What my banning taught me about justice”, *Sunday Express*, 30 September 1984.

<sup>14</sup> Given the unpopularity of his views, he had no doubts about the resistance he could expect to his message, but this did not deter him. Cf. Naudé in *The Star*, 23 February 1966: “Before I made my choice between my Church and the Christian Institute, I told my wife that we must expect much hostility and many attacks ... We are prepared to face eight or 10 years of tremendous loneliness.”

<sup>15</sup> Cf. accounts of the tapping of phone lines and raids by the security forces on the Naudés’ home (De Gruchy, 2005: 81; Naudé, 1995: 86).

<sup>16</sup> He recalls the difficult time his daughter, Liesel, had at school in Pretoria because of her father’s political activities (1995: 75). Cf. also the interviews with Ilse Naudé in the *Rand Daily Mail* (30 October 1976) after Beyers was sentenced to imprisonment for failing to pay a fine for refusing to witness before the Schlebusch-Le Grange Commission and during Naudé’s house arrest (*Rand Daily Mail*, 19 October 1982) . Cf. also the effect his banning had on his family (*Sunday Express*, 30 September 1984); “Wat kan hulle Beyers Naudé nog aandoen?”, *Pro Veritate*, 15 May 1965, pp.11, 14. Cf. Bam, 1995: 38-9.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. the bibliography, where I cite a few examples to give an account of the extent and variety of these attacks.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *The Argus*, 12 October 1973; *Sunday Times*, 15 December 1974; *Cape Times*, 13 December 1974; *The Star*, 11 December 1975.

and 1984.<sup>19</sup> However, immediately after the lifting of his restriction order, Naudé resumed his public critique of apartheid, addressing, inspiring, encouraging and challenging his fellow South Africans. Barely a month after his restriction had ended he was approached by the leaders of the South African Council of Churches and appointed to the position of General Secretary from 1985 to 1988. It was a demanding and very public position, but a challenge to which Naudé, then 69, again rose with his characteristic enthusiasm, commitment and charisma. It is no wonder that De Gruchy (2005: 81) experienced Oom Bey as “one who was always trying to enable others to *do* things that they were passionate about in terms of their theology and the situation in South Africa” (my emphasis– LDH). This he did for many through his words and example, and he still does.

### 3. Oom Bey and the Youth

Beyers Naudé undeniably had a heart for the youth of South Africa. Ever since he had become a minister this was apparent. As a young minister he was instrumental in founding the *Kerk Jeugvereniging* (the KJV, a youth organisation for the DRC) in 1954. He was one of only two delegates sent by this organisation on a six months’ study tour to learn about youth work in Europe and North America (Naudé, 1995: 39; cf. Naudé & Strauss, 1955). His passion for young people is also illustrated by his years of service on youth commissions of the DRC and his acceptance of the call to become student chaplain at the DRC congregation of Pretoria East. In his autobiography he recalls how enjoyable he found his time working among the students (1995: 40). Time and time again, at several official church gatherings and in sermons he would also take up the issue of the youth and emphasize their importance for the life of the church.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *Die Transvaler* reported in August 1978 – during his restriction – that two petrol bombs had been thrown at the Naudés’ parked car in front of their Greenside home on the same day that stones had been hurled through the sitting-room windows of another well-known restricted person, Helen Joseph.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. the following examples: in his notes for an address in Eloffsdal in November 1949 we find the following warning to the church: “Die Kerk het sy verantwoordelikheid nie beseef nie, [die] normale behoeftes van jongmense nie begryp nie – [hul] siel nie verstaan nie – omdat die Kerk hulle belang nie gesien het nie” (“The Church did not realize its responsibility, did not understand the normal needs of the young – did not understand their soul – because the Church did not see their importance.” – transl. LDH) In a sermon in Potchefstroom on 18 March 1956 on Hosea 4:1-10, 6:1-3 entitled “Gebrekkige Godskennis en Groeiende Jeugmisdaad” (Lack of Knowledge of God and Growing Youth Crime) he laments newspaper reports on the growth in crime amongst the youth and gives an increasing lack of knowledge of God and His law, the responsibility for which he lays at the door of Church and parents, as one of the main reasons for this trend. In a sermon entitled “Die Jeug en sy Weg” (The Youth and Their Path) to a group of teachers in Potchefstroom on 2 August 1959 Naudé appealed on them to realise the seriousness of their task of instilling in the youth the virtues of obedience, honesty, loyalty, courtesy, frugality and diligence, and in an address at a conference held by the DRC Classis of Johannesburg on 19 and 20 August 1961 he stressed the importance for the church to reach out to and form the values of its youth.

That Oom Bey had a message for the youth is equally undeniable.<sup>21</sup> This message he often delivered directly to them and seemed never to have missed an opportunity to speak to them or to refer to them in his public addresses.<sup>22</sup> As was the case with the political situation in South Africa in general, Naudé also brought the plight of the South African youth to the attention of the international community whenever he had the opportunity.<sup>23</sup> He saw the youth as instrumental in the life of the church, in society and in the liberation of South Africa.<sup>24</sup> I believe that the challenge to see, to judge and to act were challenges Oom Bey set before the youth of South Africa during his life and still sets before them today. He was convinced that they had the ability to meet these challenges, appreciated their energy – sometimes their impatience – and often reminded them and others of these qualities.<sup>25</sup> In his interview with Dorothee Sölle, for instance, he also

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<sup>21</sup> Likewise, this message was clearly often seen as subversive or dangerous for young people. For instance, in his autobiography (1995: 75) he recalls – as also was reported in *Die Vaderland* on 5 May 1965 – how he was forced to resign from his position as chairperson of the parents' committee of Helpmekaar Girl's High in Pretoria, the school his daughter attended. On 9 March 1965 Naudé was forcibly removed by some members of the church council of a DRC church in Belgravia, Johannesburg, to prevent him from addressing their branch of the KJV (Naudé, 1995: 78). One also only has to think of the threats levelled against Alan Boesak and fellow theology students at UWC for their efforts to have Oom Bey speak to them on the campus in 1965 (Boesak, 2005: 132).

<sup>22</sup> It is significant that the first address Naudé delivered after the lifting of his restriction order in 1984 was at the University of the Witwatersrand.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. for example, in his response to being awarded the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Human Rights Award in 1985, especially his reference the education crisis in South Africa: "No solution is possible as long as the crisis of Black education remains unaddressed or unresolved. The manner in which the SA government is currently trying to resolve it is creating the one disaster after the other and is inevitably preparing the scene for a year (1986) where the future of the education of 4,5 million black children and students will be jeopardised, deeply disrupted and possibly destroyed."

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Heaney's analysis of Naudé's address in his capacity as Secretary General of the South African Council of Churches at its assembly in Durban on 3 May 1985. In this address Naudé, when asked about the role of the church, focused specifically on the political aspirations of the youth and made suggestions as to the role of the church regarding this matter (Heaney, 2004: 202-210).

<sup>25</sup> Cf., for example, his sermons in Waverley in August 1951, Derdepoort, September 1952 and Westdene on 7 February 1954 on Isa. 45:9-16 entitled "Die Potensiële Geestelike Krag van die Jeug" (The Potential Spiritual Power of the Youth); his plea that the CI should "revalue the younger generation much more meaningfully than we have done up till now" (1972: 5); his address to the Natal Indian Congress, published in part in *Pro Veritate*, April 1976, p. 8-9: "Another factor which can no longer be ignored is the rising tide of impatience, frustration and anger amongst the younger generation of Africans, Coloureds and Indians, including University students and secondary school scholars. Part of this growing anger and determination [is] to change the political future of South Africa ..." (1976c: 8). He also includes the suffering, actions and suffering of the black youth in his warning to white South Africans of the rising tide of resistance against apartheid in the 1980s that increasingly made clear the need for change in the country in an address in Pietermaritzburg called "Whither the Whites?" on 9 April 1986 in the following words: "Because the anger and the outrage of the black community at what they have suffered at the hands of police and the army since Sept. 3 1984 is reaching frightening proportions, and every person (especially every child) being tear-gassed, shot, wounded, killed adds to that anger! A massive national movement of resistance by peasants, children, workers, students, organisations and individuals is taking shape and gaining momentum. It is time: D-day has arrived for SA!"

reflected on young people's ability to look at reality, to what is being told them about it, and to judge it.<sup>26</sup> Time and again he would also impress upon the youth the need to do this. Examples of this that immediately spring to mind are found in his address to students of the University of Cape Town on 3 June 1976, entitled "The South Africa I want", and that to graduates of the former Federal Theological Seminary at Edendale, Pietermaritzburg on 16 June 1977. In the Cape Town address, after having given an overview of the future South Africa he was dreaming of and working towards, Naudé issued this challenge to white students, also pointing out the sacrifices involved:

"It would require that you as students should first of all decide quite clearly in your own minds what kind of South Africa you wish to live in and live for; next you should decide whether you sincerely believe that you could make some kind of contribution – however small – to the establishment and furtherance of such a society; thirdly you should be quite clear in your mind that change is not going to occur overnight and that extensive sacrifices in standards of living, economic comforts, social privileges and cultural opportunities would have to be made by you as part of the white community. If you wish to become involved and to remain involved you will have to face the fact of increased government action against you – as the black students and scholars of our country have to face day by day." (1976: 6)

In the Edendale address he reminded young black theology students (in the context of growing Black Consciousness):

"This new force of Black Consciousness creates a serious dilemma, but also a tremendous opportunity for every minister: to decide the nature and extent of his identification with his people in their struggle for total liberation ... It is not impossible to visualize a situation arising in your own life where **Christian values are forced into such subservient positions that the voice of Christ could be silenced** as the cry of Amandla! rises to a crescendo when political liberation is realized ... You could consciously look at the course of present events and future developments and prepare yourself spiritually, theologically, intellectually and emotionally for these events in the realization that God wants you to make some **positive contribution, for the furtherance of His Kingdom among all people**

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<sup>26</sup> "But the young people, they are too shrewd, they've got that inner sensitivity, they've got that basic honesty, in fact that brutal honesty, in which they will listen and they will consider, they will reflect, and they will eventually come to the conclusion that what this person is saying in no way reflects reality as [they] see it, what [they] believe to be the truth as [they] experience it ..." (*Hope for Faith*, 17).

**of South Africa.** This preparation would require that you inform yourself first of all of the most crucial issues that your people in particular, but also the country as a whole, will have to face within the next decade. Therefore it is vitally important that you should ask yourself this question: **Which are the most pressing problems I as a man of God will have to assist in solving?**" (1977a: 6-7 - Naudé's emphases)

The challenge to face and judge reality with a view to overcoming ignorance, which he deplored, was one Oom Bey particularly set before the white youth of South Africa.<sup>27</sup> However, he was also convinced that, if they were freed of their ignorance, they too would have the courage and conviction to play a leading role in the liberation of the country. Therefore he always included them when expressing hopes that leaders would appear from the white sector of South Africa who would take the initiative to change the political dispensation.<sup>28</sup>

Of course, as his own life illustrated so clearly, Oom Bey's challenge to the youth did not and does not remain merely a challenge to see and to judge; it included the challenge to act on their choices. Several times Oom Bey, either personally or through the activities of the CI, encouraged or assisted young people to act on their convictions.<sup>29</sup> One of the best examples where Oom Bey challenged a

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Hope for Faith*. :17): "As far as the young white people are concerned, the majority of the young white people in South Africa live to a large degree in ignorance of what is happening, or even if they are aware, they are not concerned, they are not involved, it doesn't affect them so deeply, and even when it does, some of them are afraid that it does" . Cf. also his address to the Cassis of Johannesburg on 19 August 1961, where Naudé also appeals to his church in the light of the ignorance of the youth regarding, amongst others, the race issue in the church and country by addressing the "skreiende gemis" (glaring absence) of opportunities for debate, also at gatherings with the youth of other denominations.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Naudé's reflection on the death of Steve Biko on 19 September 1977: "Won't there come to the fore, from the ranks of our Afrikaner academics, *out of Afrikaner youth*, our Afrikaner workers ... men and women willing to say: Steve Biko's death has opened my eyes to what is truly happening and to all that is at stake; Steve Biko's message has taken hold of me and it will not release its grip; Steve Biko challenges me to not keep quiet but to voice my deepest convictions about what is right and true, to stand up for them and to suffer for them if necessary – even if this should mean that I would have to endure condemnation and rejection by my people; Steve Biko's death has helped me to wake up to my life, my true liberation ..." (Naudé, 2005: 79 – my emphasis – LDH).

<sup>29</sup> Some of the many examples of the CI's commitment to the youth were its involvement in the training of black theology students of the African Independent Churches (AICs) (cf. par. 3.3 above, International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), 1976: 88); one of the reports of SPROCAS I was on the youth, specifically the challenges the education system would face in a post-apartheid South Africa (ICJ, 1976: 111); the CI procured financial assistance for black theology students, enabling them to study locally or in Europe – among the beneficiaries were Alan Boesak and Sam Buti (Naudé, 1995: 85). Oom Bey contributed also in his personal capacity towards the education of many young black South Africans. One way he did this was to donate his share of the astronomical (for the time) amount of R10 000 in damages awarded to him in 1967 in the Pont defamation case to a fund for disadvantaged learners and students. This tradition was continued by the foundation of a Beyers

youthful audience to see, judge and act was in an unpublished address to the SCA branch of the University of the Witwatersrand on 18 June 1961 on “The Christian Student and Race Relations.” After stressing the urgency of finding a solution to the race issue in South Africa, Naudé reminded those present that:

“If Christianity wants to build out its message of salvation and freedom, it must give an adequate answer to the question of race relations. The Christian student should be in the front line of the witness of the Church? How?”

In answering the above question Oom Bey stressed three points. Firstly, he emphasised knowledge “[o]f Christ’s views and principles...of the mind of God and Christ as given in the Bible”; “[t]he Nature of Man: God’s vision of man, his sin, his depravity, his redemption – all men sinned, all men called to life...”; “[t]he unity of all believers: What that unity is – only spiritual? How it is expressed: in acts of common worship, work and sacrifice. Whether it wipes out all distinctions, all differences of culture, class, race, colour, nationality – what precisely do we mean by ‘universal brotherhood of man? And of Christians?’”; [t]he nature of the Church of Christ [and of] membership of people of different races of the same Church”; “[t]he Biblical concept of justice and love towards your neighbour: How this is expressed? How is it applied to legislation and human attitudes in South Africa?” The second point he stressed was the need for contact and discussion between Christian students of all traditions, races and cultures, and finally the need for corporate Christian witness, the need to act on convictions of faith; he admitted the latter “is perhaps the most difficult.”

The assistance and encouragement Oom Bey gave young people to act on their convictions continued even during his years of house arrest, despite great danger to himself. As Ackermann (2005: 73) notes,

“[During this time he] became involved in the illegal activities of the African National Congress (ANC) as he supported young activists intent on joining the military wing of the ANC. He records that he always asked each one of them the same question: are you sure that you have no other option? He assisted in disseminating ANC literature and helped, with small sums of money, some young people who went into exile or crossed the borders seeking military training” (cf. Naudé, 1995: 93, 120).

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Naudé Education Fund after his death. Cf. also Naudé on the need for free, equal and open education of quality in South Africa (1976b: 5).

Thus, although he never personally reverted to or condoned the use of violence,<sup>30</sup> he did have an understanding of the youths' impatience and their need to act upon their convictions in what sometimes seemed to them the only way possible.<sup>31</sup> In his address at the 18<sup>th</sup> Richard Feetham Memorial Lecture delivered by Jeremy Cronin at the University of Cape Town on 3 October 1984, Naudé also referred to the motivations for and the price many young people were willing to pay for their convictions:

"There is a growing conviction amongst the youth that the solution will have to come from the youth itself. There is a growing belief that parents, adults, churches and other institutions have failed. [And there is a] growing willingness amongst the youth to risk shootings, suffering and even dying as the inevitable price to be paid for liberation."

For his part it seems as if Oom Bey always rather looked for the reasons for the actions of the youth in the oppressive conditions they had to contend with.<sup>32</sup> However, it was less what Oom Bey actively did for them than what he stood for, the example he set in the face of adversity, *that* was what left an indelible mark on many young people who met him and spoke to him; young white theology

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. above, par. 3.3, on his support of conscientious objectors. Cf. ICJ, 1976: 16; the report in *The Star* of 4 October 1977 in which Naudé lamented the escalating violence in South Africa and called on his student audience to keep taking action, but by more peaceful means: "'The only way to avoid the growth of violence and the frightening possibility of large-scale bloodshed is a large-scale movement of non-violent actions, including forms of civil obedience,' Dr Beyers Naudé ... said in Johannesburg last night. He was speaking at the 108<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the founder of civil disobedience to effect change, Mahatma Gandhi. The meeting was organized by the University of the Witwatersrand's SRC and the Gandhi Centenary Council. Dr Naudé said non-violent action could be successful only if there were large enough support and commitment by people prepared to sacrifice personal safety and material comfort to achieve this goal."

<sup>31</sup> Cf. his address to camp-goers of the University of Pretoria's CSV (Christian Student Association) branch on 13 March 1951. In it he lists "vier uitdagings van ons tyd" (four challenges of our time): communism, war and peace, moral values and race relations saying that "[e]lke tyd sy eie besondere vraagstukke waaraan elke geslag moet voorstel om oplossing te vind— soms deur geweld. [Dit is 'n] duur prys [en vra soms] offers van miljoene lewens en [is] onberekenbaar in terme van pyn en lyding..." (every period has its own particular issues for which every generation has to suggest solutions – sometimes through violence. This is a high price to pay and sometimes requires the sacrifice of millions of lives and incalculable pain and suffering.)

<sup>32</sup> Cf: "If I have to put my hope in South Africa on the youth, it is first of all the black youth, who are responding, who are sacrificing their lives, who are trying to give a message to South Africa and to the world in a way which is, to many, shocking, totally unacceptable, painful ... why is it that we also in South Africa, as a church, don't hear this, why is it that we are not more sensitive to it? And respond to it, instead of waiting until a situation of such conflict arises, where young people are forced to take up stones and throw them, to make Molotov cocktails and to use them, and then to be condemned by a large sector of the Christian community, inside and outside the country, for doing what they are doing? Why do we do it, instead of asking ourselves, are we not basically to be blamed, that we allowed a situation to develop where these young people were forced into such an action on their part?"



students from Stellenbosch visiting Oom Bey at his home in the 1980s and 1990s as recalled by Carel Anthonissen,<sup>33</sup> not to mention the hundreds of black youths he met and spoke to during his career or who looked him up at his home during his time under house arrest (cf. Naudé, 1995: 116).<sup>34</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

Times and the situation in South Africa have changed, and with it the issues facing young people today. Even though a large percentage of the South African youth did not live under apartheid – or if they did, not for long – most of them have to live with its lingering consequences. The National Youth Policy of the South African government mentions some of these consequences:

“Over the last twenty years the lives of all young women and men have been influenced by the conditions and dynamics of apartheid. Many young men and women suffered as a result of the denial of basic human rights, sustainable only through the use of violence and force. Apartheid generated a form of continued structural violence toward young people through poverty, inferior education and the denial of basic services. Today young women and men still struggle with the legacy of apartheid. To obtain a good education, maintain physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing, access health services, and pursue meaningful employment remains a fundamental and constant struggle. Young people are still seen as a threat to society and its values, but they are themselves threatened.”<sup>35</sup>

In an article on the state of the youth in post-apartheid South Africa, Pat Lucas quotes Andy Dawes, a director of Child, Youth and Family Development (CYFD) Research Programme at the HRSC, raising some other issues:

“While there have been tremendous gains in gains in the freedoms for young people since 1994...the challenges remain considerable. [These] threaten the fabric of the young democracy, and in a very immediate sense, they constitute a threat to the lives, the futures and well-being of the young.” (*HSRC Review*, 2003)

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. “These tours became life-changing experiences for most of these students, because for the first time they were exposed to a different side of South African society. In these ventures the Naudés played an enormous role ... A visit to their home ... became a permanent feature. They were always willing to open their home and their hearts to the young people and support them in their struggles. I want to assert today that many of those students who are now contributing positively to the future of our country are doing so because they had been part of these enlightening and liberating evenings with the Naudés” (2005: 145-6).

<sup>34</sup> Speaking at the 18<sup>th</sup> Richard Feetham Memorial Lecture at the University of Cape Town on 3 October 1984, shortly after his unbanning, Naudé had a special word of thanks for the many NUSAS students who had visited him during his “twilight existence” under banning orders.

<sup>35</sup> National Youth Policy, Chapter 4: 4.

Lucas and Dawes also identified rising poverty and unemployment, HIV/AIDS and “extraordinary high levels of interpersonal violence” as high priority challenges (*ibid*).<sup>36</sup> Despite the efforts and considerable progress that have been made, education also remains a serious challenge.<sup>37</sup> For some even a good education does not ensure employment. This in turn leads to scores of educated young people leaving the country, denying it the benefit of their skills and their contributions to its development.<sup>38</sup> The sad fact of unemployment also leads to feelings of despondency, of being caught up in circumstances from which there is no hope of escape and, finally, to political apathy.<sup>39</sup> Beyers Naudé’s life is the life

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<sup>36</sup> Lucas cites some shocking statistics regarding the exposure of young people to a combination of poverty, unemployment and violence in this country: the leading cause of unnatural deaths among 15- to 19-year-olds is either shooting or stabbing; in some low-income areas 90% of children between 11 and 14 have witnessed some form of assault, 47% of them being victims of such assault. “It seems quite clear that an unemployment rate of over 30% on average [according to government sources, 73,8% of the South African unemployed are among the youth – LDH], 45% of the population in poverty, and many dying of HIV/AIDS all constitute fundamental structural risks that place millions of people on or beyond the edge of survival. Given the population profile, there are significant numbers of desperately poor young people with nothing to do, who could take up violent crime or join gangs in order to survive” (*HSRC Review*, 2003)).

<sup>37</sup> It seems significant that Beyers Naudé’s name has been linked with overcoming this obstacle: “Despite efforts over the past ten years, education in South Africa remains one of our greatest challenges. Poverty, a shortage of facilities and resources, continue to plague schools in the poorer areas. Integration remains a token affair, with lucky few parents fleeing the harsh realities of disadvantaged schools by sending their children to formerly white schools. Worst hit are our rural schools. And it is here, in the deep rural areas of South Africa, that the Beyers Naudé School Development Programme will focus its attention. Targeting schools in our poorest rural areas for sustainable interventions. Adding value and depth to the curriculum with the skills and training that will help equip schools and the surrounding community for life” (Beyers Naudé Fund Portal).

<sup>38</sup> Here, too, Naudé serves as an example for the youth. When faced with the choice and opportunity to leave the country following the issuing of his restriction order, he and his wife decided rather to endure the hardships of restriction (1995: 115-6).

<sup>39</sup> According to the IEC, 52% of voters between the ages of 18 and 24 did not vote in the local government elections in 2000. In the national elections in 1994, a survey by the SABC and Markinor showed that 44% of those who said they would not vote were in the same age group, as were 56% of voters who did obtain the required bar-coded ID. “A survey conducted by YFM found that only 25% of young people aged 18 to 24 believe that things have changed since 1994. Others have argued that young people have little if any interest in sustaining our hard-won democracy through elections. This is said to be demonstrated by the low levels of youth registration for the upcoming elections. Politicians berate the youth for not realising how important their vote is as an instrument for change in the post-apartheid period. Commentators speculate that young people lack interest, knowledge and trust in politicians and the issues of governance because politicians and government have failed to address their concerns and engage them on matters that are of concern to them” (Banda & Faull). For appeals by Naudé to the youth to act according to their Christian judgment see his sermons “Die Opdrag van die Heer” (The Command of the Lord), KJV conference, Heidelberg, 26 September 1954 on Mt. 20:1-16 and “God’s Plan met die Jeug van ons Kerk” (God’s Plan for the Youth of our Church) on Ps. 144:12 at the Pretoria Youth gathering on 16 March 1957.

of a person for whom apathy was never an option and he wished this to be the case for all Christians, also for the youth.<sup>40</sup>

It is regarding these issues that Oom Bey still challenges South Africa's young people to see, to be informed, to get to know other young people from different sectors of society and to look at the South African reality through their eyes, too. It is regarding issues like poverty, HIV/AIDS, unemployment, affirmative action and the remaining forms of inequality that Oom Bey challenges them to judge these issues in the light of God's Word. Finally, it is in the light of these realities and their Christian convictions that he challenges the youth to stand firmly by their convictions and to look for opportunities to act, never ever to fall into apathy, to rise to the challenge and be part of a solution – not merely a part of the statistics reflecting the problem. This is what Beyers Naudé did. In a sense he, too, “rose above his own circumstances”. Though Beyers was not born into a very affluent Afrikaner family, the Naudés were well-off enough – compared to them, the circumstances of the majority of black South Africans of the time were light years removed from that of the family living in the DRC vicarage in Graaff-Reinet (where Naudé spent the largest part of his childhood). There was a tremendous social and economic distance between Naudé and those whose champion he would later become. As he himself put it,

“I know that many people find it difficult to understand how it has been possible for somebody coming from that background, with my whole education, my position which I held in the Dutch Reformed Church ... with the fact that I was elected to one of the regional synods, with the fact that for 23 years I was member of the secret Afrikaans Broederbond – for somebody like that to become what I have become today.” (1985: 4)

However, all of this makes Beyers Naudé's initial ignorance all the more understandable, his rising to the challenge to “see” all the more improbable, his rising to the challenge to “judge” all the more surprising, and – with all he stood to lose and indeed did lose in material, social and professional terms – his rising to the challenge to act all the more extraordinary and dramatic. This makes his witness, too, all the greater a source of inspiration for future generations of South Africans.

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<sup>40</sup> Already in the early 1950s he shows growing concern for what he calls “die belangeloosheid van die jeug, geestelik en andersins” (lack of interested among the youth, spiritually and otherwise) in an address entitled “Die Uitdaging wat die Stad aan die KJV bied” (The Challenge the City poses to the KJV) at the DRC congregation Port Elizabeth West on 2 November 1952. Cf. “Die Roeping van die Jeug teenoor die Gemeente” (The Calling of the Youth Regarding the Congregation), a sermon on 1 Pet. 2:15 delivered at the Hartbeesspruit youth weekend on 8 March 1953 and the address to youth at the Vilheria Foundation entitled “Tot Beskikking van God” (At God's Disposal) on 21 October 1951.

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## FROM THE ARCHIVES THE CHURCHES ANSWER YOUNG PEOPLE'S QUESTIONS<sup>1</sup>

Beyers Naudé

Young people today who take their faith seriously are finding it increasingly difficult to face the world with an answer which adequately meets the needs and questions of our day. It appears as if the answers which the Church is trying to give to its youth are no longer relevant to the situations and problems which the rising generation have to face. Many young people also accuse the Church of a glaring discrepancy between creed and life, theory and practice, which is driving people away from Church and from Christianity. To cite just one point in proof: how can anybody reconcile Christ's moving prayer for the unity of all believers with the numerous divisions and schisms within the Church?

From the group of young intellectuals comes a further indictment – in no uncertain terms – that the Church is evading its responsibility in educating its youth to take their share in building society. Many complain that the Church is fighting shy of all political and social problems of a controversial nature and is thereby creating the false impression that Christianity has no right or duty or witness in these important fields of human life.

It is impossible, without a full and comprehensive investigation, to make any authoritative pronouncement of the measure of instruction and guidance which particular churches are giving to their young people on matters relating to their daily life. But we have to surmise that very little is being done in this respect by the majority of denominations in our country. From information received from responsible youth leaders there is a serious lack of knowledge and understanding amongst our young Christians of the implications of their faith for the problems they have to face. If this is the case, we would urge upon all churches the necessity of a re-evaluation of their message and the impact it is making on the thoughts and actions of their young people to enable them to become "involved" in life. A Christianity which retreats into a personal piety with a faith divorced from life in all its aspects will not only lose its power to witness to the outside world, but it also stands in danger of losing its youth – and thereby its whole future. We plead, therefore, that the Church in South Africa in its religious instruction should explain the relation between the Christian faith and e.g. such crucial problems as race relations, labour conditions, entertainments, the rights and responsibilities of man. If the Church fails to do this, youths will naturally turn to other agencies for instruction and inspiration with the painful result that the Church will be the loser. And such loss may be irreparable.

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<sup>1</sup> Editorial by Beyers Naudé in *Pro Veritate*, 15 February 1963, p. 3.



Dr Stephen T. W. Hayes<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Introduction

It may seem strange to call an article about the future a “retrospect”, but since Beyers Naudé is no longer with us, what he did in this world lies in the past, and it is that which will influence the future.

When I first met Beyers Naudé I was young (23), and he influenced my future a great deal by his words and deeds. I believe that if his words and deeds are made known to future generations, they will influence them as well. At the very time when I first began to be influenced by him, I was also influenced by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whose role in Germany had in many ways been similar to that of Naudé in South Africa. Although Bonhoeffer had been dead for 16 years when I first heard of him, he still influenced me. I believe Beyers Naudé similarly will influence many people who never knew him when he was alive in this world. As I am writing this, many people are celebrating 100 years since the birth of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, so it does not seem inappropriate to, at times, compare their influence in this article.

### 2. The formation of the Christian Institute

I first heard the name of Beyers Naudé when the Christian Institute was formed in 1963. After the Cottesloe Consultation in 1960 the Dutch Reformed Churches had withdrawn from the World Council of Churches, and hence from the ecumenical movement. Beyers and others thought that if their denomination (DRC) had officially withdrawn from ecumenical contact as a group, an alternative structure to facilitate ecumenical contact was needed. A Christian Institute, as opposed to a council of churches, which would allow people to join as individuals, would make it possible for the ecumenically minded of all Christian backgrounds and traditions to join and continue to meet others. The formation of the Christian Institute was preceded by *Pro Veritate*, a journal published by ecumenically-minded people in the Dutch Reformed Churches who regretted the decision to withdraw from the WCC, and the idea of the Christian Institute was mooted and discussed there.

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1 Stephen Hayes holds a doctorate in missiology from Unisa, where he was also a lecturer during the 1990s. He is a deacon in the Orthodox Church of South Africa, which he joined in 1987 after leaving the Anglican Church. He is a former member of the Christian Institute, knew Beyers Naudé in the early days of its existence and participated in local Bible study groups started by the Institute. At the urging of Naudé the author also started Christian Institute youth groups in Durban, and also tried to start Christian Institute groups among rural Zulu speakers in the Natal Midlands. The youth groups, in particular, showed the concern of Beyers Naudé with the youth.

Beyers Naudé first became well known outside Reformed circles when the Christian Institute was formed, with him as director, and his consequent rejection by the Transvaal Synod of the DRC, of which he had been moderator at the time.

### *2.1 Student response to the Christian Institute*

I was then a student at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg, studying theology with the hope of eventually being ordained in the Anglican Church. I attended the annual conference of the Anglican Students Federation, held at Modderpoort in the Free State in July 1963, which passed a resolution welcoming the formation of the Christian Institute. Little was known about it in those early days, but the *idea* of the Institute appealed to the students gathered from all over southern Africa and later that year I became a member.

I first met Beyers Naudé in the flesh when he came to Pietermaritzburg on 2 September 1964 to deliver a lecture at the university on the function of the Christian Institute in ecumenical relationships. Such lectures were arranged by the university for students and staff of all faculties, and were on topics of general interest. The fact that Beyers Naudé was invited to give such a lecture shows that, at least in English-speaking academic circles, the formation of the Christian Institute and Beyers Naudé's role in it was regarded as important for the country as a whole and not just for the Divinity Department of that university. Naudé addressed an informal lunch-hour meeting of students as well, and in the evening spoke at the Anglican Cathedral. Similar meetings were held all over the country, and the main aim was to publicise the Christian Institute as a vehicle for grassroots ecumenism and to recruit new members. Beyers emphasised that the CI was neither a church nor a council of churches (many of those in the Dutch Reformed Churches who opposed it presented the CI as a schismatic sect, a new denomination). In these meetings a lot of support came from Anglicans, Congregationalists, Methodists, Presbyterians and Roman Catholics, but mainly from their members in towns.<sup>2</sup>

There was also a scheme for students to sell subscriptions to *Pro Veritate* in their vacations. In the Christmas vacation of 1964/65 I worked for the Johannesburg Transport Department as a bus driver, and sold *Pro Veritate* subscriptions on the side. In my work breaks I occasionally visited Beyers Naudé in the CI offices in Braamfontein, and on one occasion asked him about the possibility of the CI becoming a confessing church (as I mentioned above, I was greatly influenced by Dietrich Bonhoeffer at that time, who was one of the leading lights in the Confessing Church movement in Germany). Beyers resisted the suggestion. He said it would give credence to the calumny in the DRC that the CI was a

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2 These denominations, unlike the DRCs, were all multiracial, but not, at that time, nonracial. They did discriminate on racial grounds on matters such as clergy stipends, structures of local congregations, synods, etc.

schismatic sect, and at that time he still hoped to be able to influence the Dutch Reformed establishment.

## *2.2 Bible study groups*

The main activity that ordinary members of the CI could participate in were ecumenical Bible study groups. These used study materials produced by the head office. One of the most prominent matters they dealt with was racism and racial discrimination. It was mainly the Dutch Reformed Churches that claimed a scriptural justification for apartheid. Most of the other denominations acknowledged that it was wrong, but continued to practise racial discrimination to some extent on grounds of expediency. There were also people such as the British Israelites (to be found in many South African denominations), who supported the ideology of apartheid, and who believed in salvation by race, not grace. Those who had been influenced by the British Israelite views did not attend the CI Bible study group meetings, but I found that participating in the Bible study groups equipped me with arguments to counter the British Israelite assertion that racism was not merely condoned by the Bible, but was obligatory.

## *3. The Liberal Party*

Another thing I was involved in during 1964 and 1965 was the Liberal Party, which at that time was the only legal party that advocated “one man, one vote.” There was no direct connection between the Liberal Party and the Christian Institute, though several people in Pietermaritzburg were members of both, but there was an indirect connection, which I shall describe more fully later.

Most of the members of the Liberal Party in Natal were black peasants who were threatened by the ethnic cleansing carried out by the National Party government in pursuit of the vision of “grand apartheid.” The Liberal Party encouraged rural people to resist the removals, and helped communities to take legal action to claim proper compensation for the loss of their homes. This, of course, delayed the ethnic cleansing programme and made it more costly, so Liberal Party leaders and organisers were banned one after the other. The Liberal Party was not a religious organisation, and had members of all or no religious affiliations who worked together for the common goal of a free and democratic non-racial South Africa. However, in the rural areas, most of its members were Christian and belonged to various denominations, though mostly to African Independent Churches (AICs). Some of these denominations were quite determined to be non-political, and the chairman of the Liberal Party branch at Stepmore, near Himeville, Enock Mnguni, a member of the Ukukhanya Presbidia Church, which was quite emphatically non-political, was under some pressure from his church leaders to stop his political activities. The Security Police made full use of this to put pressure on the church leaders themselves, and the Liberal Party was sometimes presented to church leaders as a kind of ecclesiastical rival, in the same way as the Christian

Institute was presented to people in the Dutch Reformed Churches. This was made easier because the name of the Liberal Party in Zulu, Ibandla leNkululeko, could be translated back into English as “Church of Redemption.” It seemed to me that if the Liberal Party itself was banned, as seemed quite likely at the time, an ecumenical body like the Christian Institute could step in to continue to help the rural members keep together. This was to have more significance later.

#### 4. Student ecumenism

##### *4.1 The Student Christian Association*

At many South African universities during the 1960s there were several Christian student organisations. Most of the universities had branches of Anglican Students Federation and the National Catholic Federation of Students. Some had a Methodist Society, and most also had a branch of the Students Christian Association (SCA), which was ecumenical, open to all denominations. Unlike the others, however, the SCA was much larger at the Afrikaans-speaking universities, and was there dominated by the apartheid ideology.

In the mid-1960s the Afrikaans section of the SCA used its disproportionate influence to demand that the SCA break up into four separate ethnic bodies – white Afrikaans, white English, black and coloured. This would ensure the isolation of Afrikaans-speaking youths from dangerous contact with students of other cultural groups, and so they could be protected from threatening ideologies and theologies. From the point of view of the non-Afrikaner groups, however, the result was a blow against student ecumenism. Several informal meetings between university chaplains and student leaders were held in late 1964 and throughout 1965, and an ecumenical conference was held at the Wilgespruit fellowship centre at Roodepoort to discuss the possibility of forming an ecumenical student organisation that would fill the gap left by the forced dissolution of the SCA.

These events eventually led to the formation of the University Christian Movement which was intended to be more inclusive, both racially and denominationally, than the old SCA. In one of the ironies of apartheid, however, it eventually dissolved itself in much the same fashion as the SCA, despairing of being able to bridge the black-white divide.

The Christian Institute, however, continued to bridge the racial and denominational divides. Unlike the student organisations, it mainly functioned off campus, but many young people participated in it, as well as older people. It could perhaps bridge the generation gap as well.

#### 5. Message to the people of South Africa

I completed my degree at the University of Natal in 1965, and went to the University of Durham, in England, to study for a postgraduate diploma in

theology, and was away for a little over two years. I returned to South Africa in July 1968, and in many ways things were different. The former Christian Council of South Africa had transformed itself into the South African Council of Churches. The Liberal Party had ceased to exist. The government had passed the “Improper Interference Act”, which made multiracial political organisations illegal, and the Liberal Party was forced to disband.

Shortly before my return to South Africa a theological conference had been held on the topic of *Pseudogospels in the church*, at which various theologians discussed the way in which false gospels, such as racism and apartheid, had taken root in Christian communities throughout South Africa. One of the things that came out of the conference was the *Message to the people of South Africa*. The *Message* was one aspect of a wider struggle for the “hearts and minds” of South African Christians. It was an ideological struggle, which was not unlike the struggle that had faced the Confessing Church in Germany. As Eberhard Bethge (1970:298) noted in his biography of Bonhoeffer:

“The concern of the Western ecumenicals was largely determined by practical - that is to say, political - considerations; consequently, when the struggle became a tedious contest for the confession, their interest flagged, to flare up again as soon as there was any sensational news of police action in Germany. Holding the political views he did, Bonhoeffer could easily have won over ecumenical sympathy. Instead he began his campaign against ‘heresy’ and thus found himself in notable isolation. There were very few people - and one of them was Bell - whose minds he had really been able to prepare for this crisis; in the eyes of the rest he merely seemed to have an awkward disposition to orthodoxy.”

It was the Christian Institute, led by Beyers Naudé, that had conscientised South African theologians into realising what was happening. After 20 years of National Party rule, the effects of apartheid propaganda were beginning to make themselves felt beyond the Afrikaner community.

When the National Party came to power, Christian National Education had been a blueprint. It took some time before it could be implemented, first in the white Afrikaans schools, where many teachers were sympathetic, and senior teachers were often members of the *Broederbond* (“The Brotherhood”). Bantu Education was a major effort to apply it to the majority of the population, but it took years before the ideological effect really began to be felt. First the *Broederbond* had to gain control of teacher training, and then the teachers thus trained had to gain significant influence in the schools. It was people like Beyers Naudé who were aware of what was happening who were able to warn those outside the Afrikaner community of the ideological danger. Government propaganda was bombarding

the whole population with the ideology of apartheid, at the root of which lay the false gospel of salvation by race, not grace. One's personal identity and security were, in the eyes of the apartheid ideologists, a racial identity.

Soon after the publication of the *Message* in August 1968 I travelled around Natal with Fr Cosmas Desmond, then a Roman Catholic priest, distributing the *Message* in Zulu to former members of the Liberal Party. Many of them were feeling lost and at a loose end after the disbanding of the Liberal Party. Most were active Christians, and as we visited them it seemed that a body like the Christian Institute could be very useful to them, not as a political party, but by bringing together people for Bible study and for action in their communities. We explained that this was not a revival of the Liberal Party, but that the *Message* had been drawn up by church leaders, and was a message to all the people of South Africa, and they could help distribute it. One old man, Jerome Mbhele, said, "I know, I know, we're just calling it another name" and couldn't wait to be off on his bicycle to distribute it. Others commented that they agreed with the *Message*, and said that it contained nothing new. It was white people who needed to hear this message. Black people already knew it and agreed with it.

### *5.1 Asking for auspices*

At the end of the 1968 I was to be ordained as an Anglican deacon and would be working at the Cathedral in Pietermaritzburg. Shortly before I was ordained, I went with a friend, David de Beer, to see Beyers Naudé. Dave de Beer had just graduated from Wits University with a BCom and had volunteered to serve for a year working as accountant at St Mary's Anglican Hospital at Odibo in Ovamboland, in northern Namibia. We went to ask if we could work under the auspices of the Christian Institute in establishing ecumenical contacts in the different places we would be going to. Perhaps the best way of describing the meeting is what I wrote in my diary at the time:

"Thursday 5 December 1968. We went to the Christian Institute office to chat to Beyers Naudé, who once again showed what a marvellous bloke he is, having the pearl of great price. When he discovered that Dave was going to Ovamboland, he reeled off a long list of people he thought Dave should meet, and said he should try to get in touch with some of the Lutheran missionaries there, who were having great difficulties. He said many of them were old-fashioned and *verkramp*, who had thought that if they played along with the government they would not be interfered with, but they were finding to their cost that this was not so, and that the government is imposing all sorts of ridiculous restrictions on them, like insisting on separate ethnic theological colleges. He said many of the older men could not stand up and fight it, but were just turning introspective and bitter. He also

said there were massive population removals taking place, to turn it into a new bantustan showpiece, and Dave should, if possible, let the Institute know what is going on, so that it can in turn inform the parent churches in Germany and Finland. Concerning Maritzburg, he said I should get in touch with Rev Sikakane, who is trying to set up an ecumenical centre in Edendale. He said also that the Christian Institute branches should try to do some more active things, and not merely be groups for study and discussion. Then I made some requests to him, all of which he very readily agreed to. These were: (1) that we could get poor Africans to join the Institute for a reduced subscription; (2) that we could publish literature locally in the name of the Institute, particularly in Zulu, and (3) that we should try to set up a regional office on a part-time basis, and perhaps later develop it into a full-time thing, if the work grew enough to warrant it. He not only gave the auspices of the Institute, but offered to help in every way he could, and said we should let him know if we needed money or anything of that sort."

The idea of forming Christian Institute branches among the rural peasants of the Natal Midlands and Northern Natal had crystallised in my mind, starting with places where there had been Liberal Party branches. They were people who were already experienced in running an organisation, and the Christian Institute would go some way toward filling the gap left in people's lives by the disbanding of the Liberal Party. It could lead to grassroots ecumenism, and get Christians of many different backgrounds and traditions working together. Once they had got going, they would be the kind of people who would be most likely to fulfil Beyers Naudé's desire for action groups and not just study groups.

## 6. Natal 1969

Shortly afterwards the Anglican Bishop of Natal told me that he was sending me to be assistant chaplain at the Mission to Seamen in Durban, and not to Pietermaritzburg. That put me further away from the peasants in the Natal Midlands, but every Wednesday, which was my day off from the Missions to Seamen, I went up to Pietermaritzburg, and sometimes further afield to Ladysmith, to promote the Christian Institute and recruit members.

At the end of February 1969 we had a meeting in Pietermaritzburg, which Beyers Naudé came down for. We reported progress and discussed the next steps. We proposed buying cheap cassette tape recorders (which had just come on to the market) and recording Bible study material for illiterate rural people. Beyers Naudé was enthusiastic, and promised "full and unconditional support" from the Christian Institute head office. Beyers also had a new and different vision. He did not object to our vision, but urged us to pursue his at the same time. He had

recently attended the Uppsala Conference of the World Council of Churches and had been impressed by the participation and activism of the youth. So he urged us to start youth branches of the Christian Institute, and to aim for them to be action groups and not just study groups. We agreed that we would do what we could to organise the youth, provided we had the support of the head office in organising the peasants. Beyers promised full and unconditional support for both endeavours.

### *6.1 Youth groups*

When I got back to Durban I sent out letters to CI members, or young people I thought might be interested in becoming members, and invited them to a meeting at my flat at the Missions to Seamen. Most of those I invited were people like me, who had recently been students and active in Christian student organisations, but now, having started work, found that the churches were not able to make use of their energy and enthusiasm. The best they could offer was for them to hand out hymn books at the door. This seemed to strike a chord, and the response was much larger than I had expected and very enthusiastic.

We held the first meeting on 6 March, just a week after the meeting where Beyers Naudé had made the suggestion. Many more people than expected attended, coming from all over the Durban area, and it seemed that everyone was looking for an opportunity to put their Christian faith into action in a way that was not open to them in their local churches. The group was too big and unwieldy, so we decided to divide into three sub-groups, mainly geographically based. The smaller groups would meet for an *agape* supper once a week and we would meet again in a month's time to compare notes and report progress. Each group should come up with at least one action project.

The following week the members of my smaller group, seven of us, met in my flat and at our second meeting we began to have ideas for action; one suggestion was to produce a youth magazine. The other groups all held meetings, but we would not know what they were planning until we held our next combined meeting. The latter took place at St Cyprian's Church Hall at Congella, and the number attending had doubled to more than 50. A group meeting at KwaMashu and Inanda had a project for producing a book on sex education. Some members of the group were teachers at Inanda Seminary, a school for black girls that was linked with the Congregational Church. They said that in traditional African society there had been sex education, but with urbanisation that had disappeared, and there were a lot of teenage pregnancies. The book would be to help parents instruct their children. The small group I belonged to decided to go ahead with producing a youth magazine, to be called *Ikon*.



## 6.2 *Peasants*

In the meantime I continued going to Pietermaritzburg on my days off, and going around with Selby Msimang to promote the Christian Institute among peasants in the rural areas. Beyers Naudé had urged us to involve the youth, but Selby Msimang (1886-1982) at over 80 years old was at the opposite end of the spectrum. He had been an ANC activist, and later a member of the Liberal Party. In his old age he was quite willing to become an “activist” for the Christian Institute. We also visited Enock Mnguni, who had been chairman of the Stepmore branch of the Liberal Party, near Himeville, and explained the aims of the Christian Institute to people who met at his home. There were people of various denominations there, and they reported on the responses to the *Message to the people of South Africa*. Copies of the *Message* had been sent to all clergy in the Anglican Church, but the Anglicans at the meeting said their priest had said nothing about it. They knew of the *Message* only from Mnguni, whom Cosmas Desmond and I had visited six months previously, bringing copies of the Zulu translation. This suggested at least one role for an ecumenical body like the Christian Institute in the rural areas – disseminating news of the wider Christian community in the country as a whole. When Beyers Naudé visited Natal for regional meetings at the end of May 1969 and came to a meeting at Stepmore, the attendance was disappointing. This was at least partly explained by a message that was sent by the neighbours. They wanted to attend the meeting, they said, but the Security Police had visited their landlord and told him to evict any of his tenants who attended the meeting. That was the first and last meeting of the Christian Institute branch at Stepmore.

## 6.3 *Psychedelic service*

In the meantime one of the youth groups in Durban got involved in a church service that became rather controversial. The priest of the Anglican parish of St Columba's, Greenwood Park asked me to lead the evening services there on two Sunday evenings while he was on leave. He said they did not have the traditional Anglican Evening Prayer, but instead, with the bishop's permission, had “experimental services.” I agreed, but asked if our Christian Institute youth group (some members of which were also members of the parish) could join me in planning and leading the service, which was eventually held on 1 June 1969.

We had invited all the members of the other Christian Institute youth groups to come and many of them brought friends, and the Inanda Seminary teachers brought some of their pupils, so the church was full, with the visitors outnumbering regular parishioners. It began with the church in darkness and a voice saying “Let there be light”, followed by flashing lights and loud recorded music (from *The Electric Prunes*), to symbolize light emerging from darkness and order from chaos. Instead of taking a collection, we passed round a plate of coins

and invited people to take some. At the end of the service we sang a new hymn, *Lord of the dance*, and urged the congregation to dance out of the church.<sup>3</sup>

Though most of the congregation seemed to like the service, the church wardens of the parish did not and made their views known to some members of the Christian Institute group. The next day the church wardens complained to the bishop of Natal, Bishop Vernon Inman, about the service and the bishop asked me to resign, which I did. Dick Usher, a journalist and member of the CI youth group of which I formed part, wrote a short report on the incident which appeared in the *Daily News*, and then the *Natal Mercury* wanted to run a follow-up. The members of the Christian Institute youth groups were furious at Bishop Inman, especially when he refused to meet them. To me, the bishop had said at my parting interview with him, "If this is the kind of thing that the Christian Institute is doing, it will find a very powerful enemy in me."

At the weekend I went to see Beyers Naudé at his home in Greenside and I told him what had happened. Our discussions kept being interrupted by phone calls from reporters from the *Sunday Times*, who passed on the information that Bishop Inman himself would be preaching at St Columba's on the Sunday night. At that service the bishop damned us completely and made no attempt at reconciliation. The front-page headline on the *Natal Mercury* the following morning read: "Church profaned, says Bishop."

#### 6.4 "Wilde jeugblad"

In the meantime the other project of our Christian Institute youth group continued. We took *Ikon* to the printers. It had an article on human and inhuman settlements, referring to formal and informal settlements around Durban; one by Archbishop Helder Camara of Brazil, addressed to the youth, on "What you should do in response to the crisis of our times", a letter from a fellow student of mine in Durham, written from jail after he had been charged for planting a petrol bomb in Westminster Abbey, a couple of articles on the significance of Orthodox icons, and one on the misuse of the words "terrorist" and "terrorism" in South African political rhetoric. I also, at the request of Beyers, wrote a full account of the St Columba's affair, for the information of members of the Christian Institute. It was also an official press release from the Christian Institute on the matter and so was distributed to newspapers. In the meantime a couple of Congregational ministers were putting out feelers about the Christian Institute youth groups holding services in their churches.

Shortly afterwards, during the week of 16 June 1969, Beyers Naudé was supposed to have come to Durban to meet Bishop Inman and the youth groups to see if he

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3 *Lord of the dance*, by Sydney Carter, was then a new hymn, but has become the hymn most frequently sung at school assemblies in the UK over the last 20 years.

could bring about reconciliation. At the last minute he was unable to come and sent Bruckner de Villiers as an emissary instead, which turned out to be disastrous. His message to the members of the CI youth group was very far indeed from Beyers's one of "full and unconditional support." He was very patronising about what we were doing, said we were jeopardising the real work of the Christian Institute, and said that if we wanted to do such things we should do them under another name, and not under the name of the Christian Institute. But we had only begun doing them at all because Beyers Naudé had urged us to do so.<sup>4</sup>

At the end of that week I collected the first issue of *Ikon* from the printers and our CI youth group sent copies to anyone we thought might be interested, as a free sample, in hope that enough people would find it sufficiently interesting to subscribe. The following week we had a series of frantic calls from Beyers Naudé, asking that we withdraw *Ikon* immediately. He had taken legal advice, according to which we could be prosecuted under three different Acts. However, the Natal Christian Institute members concerned in it had a series of meetings and were rather sceptical. This sounded like a storm in a teacup stirred up by the excitable people in Johannesburg. Natal was more laid-back and we couldn't understand what the fuss was about. We talked to a Pietermaritzburg attorney, who said that though he couldn't see what the objection was, to be on the safe side we should send a letter to all the people to whom we had sent copies, saying that though we ourselves did not think the publication was objectionable, some might find it so, and so we were withdrawing it.

Beyers phoned again. He had consulted more Johannesburg advocates and wanted me to drive round the country, personally collecting every copy we had sent out and burn them. There was no way I could do it, as my car was in pieces in a friend's garage. And anyway, I did not know all the people we had sent copies to. I read him the withdrawal letter we had drafted and he said, "You can't send that out, saying you still see no objection to the publication." I said I wasn't, as one of the editors, going to send out 500 admissions of guilt all over the country. "But you are guilty," he said. "There cannot be the least doubt about that." Eventually we persuaded him to let us see a Natal advocate, which we did. He looked through the magazine, and said he didn't see what the problem was. He couldn't think of one Act we could be prosecuted under, much less three.

Nevertheless, we sent out letters to those we could remember we had sent copies of *Ikon* to, and announced that it was being withdrawn. And since it seemed that the auspices of the Christian Institute had been withdrawn at the same time, we

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4 It seemed clear to us that De Villiers knew very little about what we had been doing, and had been spending most of his time in trying to form a new political party to the left of the National Party, but to the right of the Progressive Party. Since the United Party already occupied that political niche, it seemed to us as pointless an exercise as what we had been doing seemed to him.

reissued it in the name of "CHURCH, an ecumenical fellowship meeting for prayer, study and action." CHURCH was an entirely nebulous non-organisation, invented because Unity Publications, the printing press that ran in the backyard of Archbishop Denis Hurley, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Durban, could not print anything that did not come from church groups, as they did not have a commercial licence. Thus, *Ikon* number 1 was replaced by 1a, which was the same except that the letter from my friend who had planted the petrol bomb in Westminster Abbey, with the title "The fire next time", was replaced by a rather bland one called "Blessed are the meek" by Thomas Merton. It appeared the letter was what had put the wind up the Transvaal lawyers, especially one sentence, "We must go out in the streets and shout, with explosives if necessary."

## 7. Namibia

A couple of days later Colin Winter, the Anglican bishop of Damaraland (Namibia), invited me to go and work in his diocese doing some ecumenical and educational work with Dave de Beer. If he had not phoned, I would probably have joined the Orthodox Church within the next few weeks - I eventually did so 18 years later. I went up at the end of July. De Beer, who had gone with me to ask Beyers for auspices six months earlier had spent a week working at St Mary's Hospital in Ovamboland before his permit had been withdrawn. En route back to Johannesburg, Bishop Winter persuaded him to stay on as diocesan treasurer. After a couple of months in Windhoek he had a vision of a community or commune of young people, some in secular jobs, some doing full-time church work. He put his vision in writing and sent it to friends under the title, *The city, the mission field*. When I read it, I wrote half jokingly that I would join him as soon as the Bishop of Natal sacked me. And when I *was* sacked, he wasted no time in holding me to my promise. So I went. We formed the "Community of St Simon the Zealot", which though theoretically ecumenical, in practice was largely Anglican, with a few full-time church workers, and some in secular jobs, and some temporary members, like students on vacation.

As a secular job, I worked for the Department of Water Affairs as a water works attendant. The job entailed going around servicing the meters that measured water levels in rivers and boreholes, and was a marvellous way of seeing the country. Soon, however, I was fired, without notice. I was to leave immediately. My immediate bosses had a fat file on the desk and I managed to catch a glimpse of the document on top of the pile. It was a press cutting from *Beeld*, and the headline was "CI keer wilde jeugblad" (Christian Institute curbs unruly youth magazine).

### 7.1 Christelike Stigting

The idea of doing "ecumenical work" was attractive, but there was not much to go on. There was no Council of Churches in Namibia in those days and no organized

ecumenical activity. It seemed that if the Christian Institute did not exit, it would be necessary to invent it, but after our encounter with Bruckner de Villiers we were reluctant to ask for auspices from the Christian Institute again. We therefore formed a Christian Foundation ("Christelike Stigting"), which ran on similar principles to the Christian Institute, with individual membership open to people of any Christian tradition. It did not attract the top leaders of the churches in Namibia, nor was it intended to. Members were teachers, nurses, seminarians and social workers. In April 1971 Beyers Naudé visited Windhoek and saw for himself what we had been doing, and had no objections, so we wound up the Christelike Stigting and amalgamated it with the Christian Institute.

## *7.2 Theological education by extension*

In November 1969 I travelled with Bishop Colin Winter on a tour of South Africa, and in Johannesburg we met Rick Houghton, an American deacon who had come to help with the St Mary's Theological Seminary at Odibo in Ovamboland. At that time the school had six students and was being run by another American priest.<sup>5</sup> I took Rick Houghton to the Christian Institute offices, where we had heard of another project it was running: a correspondence course in theology for ministers of African Independent Churches. We asked if Namibia could be part of the pilot scheme to test the courses. Anglicans could use them in Ovamboland for training lay ministers. And in Windhoek yet another American priest had been running courses for some of the AICs there, but had to return home. In the end nothing much came of this particular scheme, though for me personally it awakened an interest in the possibilities of theological education by extension, which continued for some time and led eventually to the formation of the Khanya Theological Correspondence Course in 1972, which a few years later amalgamated with a couple of similar schemes to form the Theological Education by Extension College of Southern Africa (TEEC), which is still flourishing today.

## *7. The role of Beyers and the Christian Institute*

On the same day that Rick Houghton and I visited the Christian Institute offices to look at the theological training programme, we met Beyers Naudé, Fred van Wyk and Mark Collier to discuss the future of ecumenical work in Southern Africa. It was a kind of strategic planning session and also a kind of evaluation, not quite a year after Dave de Beer and I had gone to ask Beyers if we could do ecumenical work under the auspices of the Christian Institute in northern Namibia and in Natal.

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<sup>5</sup> The previous Anglican Bishop of Damaraland, Bishop Robert Mize, who had been deported from Namibia a year previously by the South African government, persuaded many Americans to join the diocese as clergy and teachers. Rick Houghton, who was about my age, was one of them.

*7.1 Bureaucratic centralism or mass movement?*

Beyers explained their dilemma. Christians in South Africa (and Namibia, which was then ruled by South Africa) were facing increasing persecution from the government. If they took a cautious line, they would tend to lose support from overseas bodies. If they took a more radical line, they would tend to lose local support.

I saw the problem somewhat differently. The dilemma as I saw it was that the Christian Institute did not so much have to choose between overseas and local donors, but rather between being a group defined by the head office, with strong central control, or whether it became a mass movement of the people. The Christian Institute and its leaders spoke with two voices on this. On the one hand, Beyers Naudé had urged us to form youth groups that would be action groups, but had perhaps not given sufficient thought to what might happen if the “action” became an embarrassment to some people at the head office: in particular radical forms of worship and a radical magazine. Then there was another problem with the youth groups that should have been foreseen, but was not. As the youth groups grew, they attracted more and more do-gooders. They wanted to run clinics and soup kitchens and such things. Some of us, while having no objection to this, did not see it as the primary task of the Christian Institute youth groups. It also seemed to me that those who were keen on starting clinics and the like wanted to do things *for* people and not *with* them. We took our lead from people like Archbishop Helder Camara of Brazil (whose paper we had published in *Ikon*): the task of the youth groups, and indeed the Christian Institute as a whole, was to *conscientizar* the masses.<sup>6</sup>

In this task, I saw the rural peasants as more significant and important than the bourgeois youth of Durban, though the involvement of the Young Christian Workers, which was just beginning when I left, might have changed this. I had handed over the keys to the regional post box in Pietermaritzburg to Selby Msimang, but both he and Geoff Moorgas (who was the contact for the Durban youth groups) told me that they had heard nothing from the CI head office. When I pointed this out at the November meeting in Johannesburg, Beyers said they had not received any of the communications from the members in Natal. That was quite possible, as the Security Police often intercepted mail, though some must have been received, because the Natal members had been informed earlier that their nominees for the central committee could not be accepted, so the nominations, at least, must have been received. It seemed to those in Natal, both

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<sup>6</sup> In the 1970s the Portuguese term was Anglicised as “conscientise”, and became familiar in South Africa. In the 1960s, however, it was known mainly in its Portuguese form, as used by people like Dom Helder Camara. While I say that this was my view, I was not alone in it – there were several conscientisers and several do-gooders, but I cannot speak for the others, so I just say what my view was, even though others shared it.

the rural peasant groups and the urban youth groups, as if the Christian Institute head office had abandoned them, and it was for this reason that in Namibia we formed a Christian Foundation, rather than a Christian Institute. In 1972 Dave de Beer and I were deported from Namibia together with Bishop Winter, and a few months later we were both banned.

In the beginning, the Christian Institute seemed to be trying to *conscientizar* the masses. By having individual membership, rather than being a council of churches with representative membership, and by providing resources for small Bible study groups, it showed the potential for becoming a mass-membership organisation. If the head offices provided the resources, local groups could multiply and conscientise Christians of different denominations and in different languages throughout the country. But in 1969 the head office in Johannesburg seemed to shift from a coordinating to a controlling function. This tendency was not confined to the Christian Institute. The CI was one of a consortium of assorted ecumenical and denominational organizations that bought Pharmacy House, an office building in Braamfontein. This made it convenient for overseas ecumenical visitors who had come to South Africa to “see for themselves” – they could travel from floor to floor without leaving the building, and say that they had seen the church in South Africa and spoken to its movers and shakers. Those of us on the periphery were not so sure. We heard horror stories of the creeping bureaucracy at the headquarters and mixed up with them was the news that people in the CI office were beginning to refer to Beyers Naudé as “Oom Bey.”<sup>7</sup>

## 7.2 *A confessing church?*

I have already mentioned that in one of my early meetings with Beyers Naudé we discussed the possibility of the Christian Institute becoming the nucleus of a Confessing Church - the idea of a “Confessing Church” came to South Africa through the life and work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The question was raised from time to time in *Pro Veritate*, and was in the minds of quite a number of Christians in South Africa. In 1973 Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer’s biographer, visited South Africa. I was banned at the time and unable to attend his lectures, though friends recorded one of them on tape, and Bethge came to visit me and we spent an afternoon chatting. Several of those who had heard Bethge’s lectures commented afterwards that they were disappointed that he had said very little about the Confessing Church. I got the impression that he was used to speaking to European and American audiences, where most of the interest was in Bonhoeffer as a theological innovator, and not as a resister of state tyranny. He seemed unprepared for the questions that South Africans threw at him about the Confessing Church.

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<sup>7</sup> Eventually, as the years passed, we got used to the idea of referring to Beyers “Oom Bey,” but I was never comfortable with it.

At the time many in South Africa were more attracted by Bonhoeffer's orthodoxy than by his alleged innovations. Western theologians seemed to be looking at Bonhoeffer's thought as a tool for bringing Christianity into line with the modern world and modern thought. It was essentially an exercise in taming Christianity and making it fit in with the status quo of society. But those who seek to change their theology will rarely change the world. In the words of Chesterton:

"As long as the vision of heaven is always changing, the vision of earth will be exactly the same. No ideal will remain long enough to be realized, or even partly realized. The modern young man will never change his environment; for he will always change his mind."  
(1990:107-108)

Thus theological liberalism often went hand in hand with political conservatism, and vice versa. This could even be seen within the Dutch Reformed Churches, where the *Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk* (NHK) was the most politically conservative, having a clause in its constitution that there was to be no equality between black and white "in church or state", and yet had a reputation of being theologically liberal.

And in this both Bonhoeffer and Beyers Naudé were alike. Beyers Naudé was no theological innovator. He was a radical theologian in the sense that he went to the roots of the Christian faith and discovered nothing there to support apartheid. And his greatest achievement was to awaken many Christians, to conscientise them, in fact, and make them aware that the "faith once delivered to the saints" was incompatible with the status quo of apartheid, ethnic cleansing and state tyranny.

### *7.3 The Beyers Naudé I knew*

I have tried in this article to say something of Beyers Naudé as I knew him, and I've told it, warts and all. Not everything ran smoothly. But perhaps I should summarise by saying that the good times outweighed the bad ones. Yes, at times I thought Beyers Naudé made errors of judgement, though I suspect that that was mainly when his better judgement was pushed aside by the views of bad advisers like Bruckner de Villiers, who certainly did not share Beyers Naudé's enthusiasm for youth participation. Beyers's drive and enthusiasm pushed me to do things I had doubts about, like starting the Durban youth groups of the Christian Institute, and yet from that I met interesting people and learned valuable lessons. His confidence was vindicated, and my doubts shattered, by the unexpectedly enthusiastic response to the starting of the youth groups. And then there was the way Beyers spoke Afrikaans. Whether in speaking or writing, he made Afrikaans seem like a beautiful language. Even when he was prosaic, he was poetic. Whenever I was with him, I wished I could speak Afrikaans as he did. But, for me, his main legacy was the way he conscientised the Christians of South Africa.



## 8. Back to the future

But what of the title, “Oom Bey and the future”? Yes, I think I can call him that, now after his death. At the end I think Beyers could say, with St Simeon, “Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.”

Alan Paton, speaking to a meeting of the Anglican Students Federation in the 1960s, at the time Beyers Naudé was founding the Christian Institute, said that righteousness must be its own reward. We must struggle for a free, just and democratic society, even though we could never expect to see it in our lifetime. But Beyers Naudé did see it in his lifetime. Does that mean that Oom Bey belongs to the past, as a footnote in the history books, or perhaps warranting a paragraph or two in church history books? A road or two named after him, with future generations perhaps wondering why? Our status quo today is certainly not the status quo that Beyers Naudé struggled against in the past. Apartheid, ethnic cleansing and civil repression belong to the past in South Africa. Unlike Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Beyers Naudé was permitted to see their end.

But, though the status quo has changed in the sense that we pay lip service to better ideals, we should surely be able to see that many of those ideals have not yet been realised. A friend once said, back in the bad old days, “When South Africa has solved the problem of black and white, it will come face to face with the real problem: the haves and the have-nots.” And, as we look at the wider world, we can see that the struggle continues. At the very time South Africa was abandoning apartheid and ethnic cleansing, Yugoslavia was breaking up and embracing the goals that South Africa had abandoned. In the 1960s countries like Britain and the USA criticised South Africa for civil repression in such legislation as the Terrorism Act, yet Britain is trying to introduce 90-day detention without trial, and the USA has introduced laws in many ways indistinguishable from the 1967 Terrorism Act in South Africa. And so the witness of people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Beyers Naudé remains as relevant today as it did when they were alive on this earth, and will for the foreseeable future, for Christians can never feel comfortable with the status quo. The struggle continues! *A luta continua! Die stryd duur voort!*

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Beyers Naudé

I would not dare to entitle this article: South Africa Tomorrow and the Day After Tomorrow, because only a very wise and brave man would today risk speculating as to South Africa's appearance the day after tomorrow. But it is definitely possible – and necessary – to reflect on the near future – especially for those inhabitants who are in earnest about helping to create a more just and more humane South Africa than the land of discrimination and injustice it is today.

At the head of our reflection must be placed the important acknowledgement (decisive for the future of our country) that South Africa is a multiracial country and will progressively become more so. The propaganda machines of the government (SABC, Current Affairs, the Afrikaans newspapers, SABRA, etc.) have for years succeeded in deceiving the majority of whites in South Africa into believing that the policy of apartheid (later separate development, latest multinational development) was eminently successful. Self-interest, indolence and fear led the whites into believing and clinging naively and short-sightedly to the belief that, once the so-called homelands policy for the Bantu had come into full application, the “non-white question” would be solved. Ideological and psychological blindness refused to allow any rational person to acknowledge the obvious fact that, even if all seven (or is it already eleven if one includes South West Africa?) homelands immediately received their *full* independence, the so-called “white designated” South Africa would then still have a population of 8 million Africans, 2 million coloureds and nearly one million Asians. Slowly (unfortunately too slowly) the younger, thinking white in particular is beginning to discover that the wishful thinking of advocates of apartheid is an illusion – but unfortunately the vast majority are not yet prepared or in a position openly and frankly to acknowledge that the policy of apartheid of the National Party has failed sadly and that it can for a time still be maintained, but only by the force of compulsive legislation, police measures and intimidation.

The dam walls are going to give way

Here a second fact must be stated, that black solidarity and black pressure is going to increase on all fronts – at times with a seriousness and speed which will leave the average white stupefied, confused and embittered. For years the whites have, by their exploitation and educational advantages, built one wall or dam wall after the other in order to put as much distance as possible between the white man and

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<sup>1</sup> Editorial by Beyers Naudé in *Pro Veritate*, 15 November 1972, pp. 1-3.

the black man and to fortify the partition of separation as thoroughly as possible. Today we have reached the point where the walls cannot be built any higher – and where the dams are beginning to overflow. From now on only one thing can happen: the little stream of black solidarity (blissfully unaware that it is being fed by the present race policy) is becoming a river which is filling the dams and pressing ever more strongly against the race walls. If the white man is not helped to understand this and to acknowledge and yield to the validity of legitimate black claims, the river will become a mighty irresistible flood which will rush over the dam walls, flood over the walls and carry away with it all white fortifications of political, economic, educational and social privileges.

As a matter of course the question arises: what will be the reaction from the white side? It seems to me that we can expect a dual reaction: greater political openness and fluidity from some whites who are trying to read and understand the signs of the times – and from the majority a stronger, realistic solidarity, principally motivated by fear of inundation. The origin and action of far-right movements such as Scorpio are just one expression of this. As the tension between white and black increases, the fear of many whites and the frustration of many blacks will be transformed into mutual bitterness and hate.

#### *Fatal to ignore SPROCAS*

In this situation the churches and Christians are called to give a Christian testimony. Is this still possible? And can such a witness still be meaningfully presented and properly understood? As far as the three white Afrikaans churches are concerned, I am afraid that they have so compromised themselves by their uncritical identification with the government's race policy that they will be unable in official institutional capacity to prepare their members for this South Africa which is already there (for those who want to see) and will be there tomorrow. That is why the deliberate disregard or suppression of the study and action programme of SPROCAS by these churches (and thus by the Afrikaans political press) is not only extremely short-sighted and childish, but one day thousands of members of these churches will, when it is too late, fling the bitter reproach at their church leaders: why did you not prepare us for the morrow?

As far as the "English-speaking churches" are concerned, it is encouraging to note that some of them have set up active programmes to prepare both white and black members for the new reality. But much more will have to be done (especially in the education of the ordinary member at "grassroots level") than heretofore to help particularly the white Christians to bring the offers which Christ has the right to expect from them. One every important contribution to this educational process is the systematic inclusion of all congregations of all these churches in the study and action programme of SPROCAS. Their participation or non-participation is for

me the test of their earnestness and sincerity to ban for good racial discrimination and injustice from the life of church and society.

As far as the black churches are concerned, a long road of social awareness, of the ending of mutual strife and dissension, of greater identification with and franker interpretation of the aspirations of the black man for his own membership lies ahead. In this respect the women have already progressed further than the men and it is of vital importance that there should be more harmony through unified action of black church.

#### *The Confessing Church*

In the midst of all the turbulence and change, it is essential that there should be this group of Christians (relatively speaking, small) which, in obedience to God, will be prepared to expect and endure condemnation and rejection from both sides for the sake of the visible and practical realisation of their Christian faith in all spheres of society. It is this joint witness of black and white Christians which forms the essence of the "confessing Church" and through which they can work together in thankfulness and humility for Christ's action in the establishment of the sovereignty of His Kingdom in South Africa.

# OOM BEY FOR THE FUTURE: BEYOND RESISTANCE AND HOPE<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Godwin I. Akper<sup>2</sup>

“O my Church, I call today with all the earnestness that is in me: awake before it is too late, stand up and stretch your hand of Christian brotherhood to all who reach out to you in sincerity! There is time, but time is becoming short, very short.” ( Beyers Naudé)<sup>3</sup>

## 1. Introduction

For many Christians worldwide, past and present, the name “Oom Bey” reminds them of *resistance* and *hope*. They think of the late Dr Beyers Naudé as someone who resisted the forces that were put in place to suppress any attempt – no matter how peaceful and well-meaning – to liberate people of colour in South Africa. They also think of Oom Bey as someone who gave hope to the poor and oppressed: the hope that there is a future for them, for South Africa and for Southern Africa, beyond struggles and liberation.

For Oom Bey this future was two-fold. On the one hand, apartheid would be dismantled and an inclusive democracy, in which all races will participate without fear or favour, would be inaugurated in the Southern African region (including Namibia and Rhodesia, as Zimbabwe was called at the time). But, on the other hand, the South African Church and society would enter into a future of disaster – a future that would pose challenges other than those of apartheid and its policies.

For South Africa, this two-fold future was realised in the post-April 1994 era. However, Oom Bey was also concerned with the apparent lack of preparedness on the side of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa to face this future and its impending effects on the structural unity and ministry of the Church. He was also concerned with how a lack of keenness on the side of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa to prepare for this future could render it irrelevant in the future South African public sphere.

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<sup>1</sup> Paper read at the mini-conference entitled “Oom Bey for the Future” hosted by the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology at Faculty of Theology of the University of Stellenbosch on 24 August 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Godwin Akper is a lecturer at the University of Mkar, Nigeria. He is a Research Associate in the Department of Systematic Theology and Ecclesiology at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa. Akper was also a post-doctoral research fellow at the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology at the University of Stellenbosch from 2004-2005.

<sup>3</sup> Naudé, C.F.B. 2005. “Obedience to God.” In Hansen, L.D. (ed), *The Legacy of Beyers Naudé*, Stellenbosch: SUN PReSS, pp. 25-29.

In my reflections on the meaning of the legacy of Oom Bey for this generation and the one to come, I shall explore a sample of aspects of the “present future” and the one to come that Oom Bey saw, and his various calls on the Church to prepare and face the (then) impending future. I shall also make some proposals as to how I think the present and future generations of Christians in (South) Africa can “draw from the well” which was Oom Bey in order to “wash the dust” that the dawning of a new era in (South) African political and religious history has stirred up.

## 2. Possible futures

### *2.1. The future unification of the Southern African Reformed Churches*

Firstly, Oom Bey saw a future coming, *when structural unity of the so-called Dutch Reformed family of churches would be difficult to attain*. I did not get to meet Oom Bey in person. However, reading his occasional papers and essays written in his honour by people who knew him best, I am able to discern that he was not prepared to “sit on the fence” regarding serious issues like justice, unity and reconciliation - at least after his “conversion” in the years following the 21 March 1960 Sharpeville massacre. Oom Bey had the courage to challenge his own church, the Dutch Reformed Church, and the entire Afrikaner community to part ways with the system of apartheid and to embrace reconciliation, unity and justice for all in South Africa. In his sermon entitled *Obedience to God* (Acts 5:14-42), which he preached on 22 September 1963 at the Aasvoëlkop congregation, Oom Bey told his fellow church members that “we are all called to act with the utmost responsibility, but certainly not to remain silent. The proclamation of the Gospel cannot harm the Church of Jesus Christ.”<sup>4</sup> Of course, Oom Bey was aware that there were many within the ranks of the DRC that, in their hearts, were convinced that racial segregation within and outside the Church was inconsistent with the claims of the gospel of Christ. However, he was equally aware that the DRC was a major supporter of apartheid and its implementation within the Church’s structures. Thus, to a large extent, Oom Bey was convinced that his own church was doing everything possible to sustain the system of apartheid. Therefore, it was going to take a long time, if ever, before the DRC could make any remarkable effort towards church unification, or even towards embracing the larger Christian Church, given the fact that it was equally difficult for her to renounce racial segregation as sinful.

Oom Bey was adamant that an inclusive South African society would be impossible without the creation of a non-racial (Reformed) Church in South Africa. And, if that such a church was to be created in the years following the banning of oppositional political parties, their leaders, as well as civil society organisations committed to the struggle, then the DRC was to play an important

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

role in the creation of that church by denouncing racial segregation at all levels. This admission of error was then to encourage people who, though convinced that the social order that has existed up till then was inconsistent with their Christian beliefs and convictions, were nevertheless influenced by other factors to remain silent and not to come out on the side of justice, unity and reconciliation.

Oom Bey did not hesitate to mention those factors that affected and still affect the move in support of justice, structural unity and reconciliation in the Church and in society:

“the fear that if they speak, the Church will be harmed  
the fear that our members are not yet ready to accept these truths  
the possible repercussions in our congregations”.<sup>5</sup>

No one who moved in the circles of the family of Dutch Reformed Churches in Southern Africa at the time could doubt the prevalence of the above-mentioned fears in these churches and their effect on the possibility of structural unity within this family of churches. The family, despite the structural unification among some of her members in the 1990s, ironically struggles, even at this later stage in a democratic South Africa, to worship together as a family.

The hopes for a multiracial Dutch Reformed Church in (Southern) Africa again received a serious blow in 2004 when in October the General Synod of the DRC took a decision based on the fear of the possible repercussions that such a united church, with the Confession of Belhar as one of her confessional standards, may have on the current membership of the DRC. It was feared that this might cause a possible split within its membership. In a situation like this Oom Bey's living message is that the “proclamation of the Gospel cannot harm the Church of Jesus Christ”!<sup>6</sup>

The deadlock met by URCSA (Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa) and the DRC on the unification process confirms that Oom Bey was right when he publicly declared that were any structural unity to take place between the white and non-white Dutch Reformed Churches, it will never be at the insistence of the DRC – the mother church of the family. The question is whether the call made to us, the non-white members of DRC family of churches, by Welile Mazamisa during the October 2004 Barmen/Belhar Consultation at Stellenbosch, to initiate a process conducive to an easy take-off of a united multiracial Reformed Church is not the only option left to us and the DRC.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

## *2.2 Future reconciliation between black and white*

Secondly, Oom Bey warned against a *future when blacks, due to frustration and suspicion, will reject reconciliation* from the side of whites. On 16 March 1977 Oom Bey expressed his concern to the graduates of the now defunct Federal Theological Seminary, Edendale over the future possibility of blacks rejecting any offer of reconciliation from their white compatriots, no matter how genuine it might be:

“I am aware that many blacks, including black Christians, have become increasingly suspicious when whites approach them with a plea for reconciliation. They state unequivocally: you whites want reconciliation while we blacks seek liberation, and only when you are prepared to identify yourselves with our goal for liberation can there be true reconciliation. Without that, any such plea could never be realised.”<sup>7</sup>

In a word, as people who have gone through the pains of oppression, the blacks viewed any offer of reconciliation devoid of justice as false and another vicious attempt to further intensify their sufferings. Hence, they put a “price tag” on reconciliation, namely their emancipation to true humanity. Yet this was the precious price that the then structures, both in Church and society, were unwilling to pay for reconciliation. Oom Bey made the point clear that both those demanding justice as a necessary condition for reconciliation and those denying that justice belong to the same church and, in many cases, to one congregation. He then asked the young seminary graduates: *“What will be Christ’s demand of you under these circumstances”?*<sup>8</sup> [my italics – GIA]

Signs have already appeared that the non-white Dutch Reformed Churches are beginning to reject the white DRC’s form of reconciliation. It looks as if even the reconciliatory hand that the former first stretched out to their mother church is almost at the verge of being withdrawn, if reconciliation would mean that justice is apparently being downplayed in the so-called “new church” to be. This became all the more apparent for all to see last year when talks toward unification between DRC and URCSA ended in a deadlock over, among other things, the absolute call for a commitment to *justice* emphasised in the Belhar Confession. It does not seem as if URCSA is willing to compromise the Belhar Confession for the sake of reconciliation (unification). This is exactly the point made by Oom Bey as far back as 1977, emphasising that, at least where non-whites were concerned, it was difficult to contemplate any true reconciliation then and in the future without a commitment to justice for the poor and oppressed.

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<sup>7</sup> Naudé, C.F.B. 1977. “Christian Ministry in a Time of Crisis.” *Pro Veritate*, Vol. 15, No. 11, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*



Currently, outside Church structures in the academy, there is a theological shift towards retrieval of African traditional (theological) resources (the so-called “African agency discourse”). There is also a growing suspicion of white participation in the African agency discourse. The participation of white theologians is viewed as “opportunistic” or, to use the words of Tinyikyo Maluleke and Sarojini Nadar, as another “subtle way of marginalising” the previously oppressed blacks.<sup>9</sup> It is asked about socially engaged white scholars who dare to participate in the African agency discourse, like Gerald O. West, “since when have they discovered that they are part of (South) Africa?”, and “how come all of a sudden...[do] they claim to care so much about the situation of the poor and the margins?”<sup>10</sup> The challenge this situation presents to the DRC family is the denial of the possibility for “conversion”. It is as if black (Reformed) Christians have not come to the point where they can trust the honesty and sincerity of the commitment of some whites to work together with non-whites in order to bring about a positive change in South Africa. Yet, for this generation and the one to come, the message of Christ as preached by Oom Bey – such as, for instance, the one at his inauguration as director of the Christian Institute in 1963 – is that reconciliation as a New Testament concept is something that “we should grasp and apply in honesty and humility if we want to call ourselves Christians.”<sup>11</sup> Christ’s demand of us, as Oom Bey put it, is to embrace with humility the gospel of reconciliation. We have reconciliation as an integral article of faith in the Confession of Belhar and the Heidelberg Catechism to guide us, why should the New Testament be too broad for some not to discern the gospel of true reconciliation from it?

### *2.3 A future of subservient Christian values*

Thirdly, Oom Bey had a vision of a *future to come*, following political liberation, when Christian values would be forced into subservient positions. Churches played a key role in political oppression and the struggle against it under the apartheid regime. The role of the Church in the public sphere was evident at the time. From the perspective of the community of the oppressed, their churches were symbols of justice and liberation from political oppression. Both the South African Church and society were preoccupied with the challenges that political oppression posed to them. Freedom inevitably became a major value for Church and society in South Africa.

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<sup>9</sup> Nadar, S. & Maluleke, T.S. “The Agency of the Oppressed Discourse: Consciousness, Liberation and Survival in Theological Perspective,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 120 (November 2004), p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Masenya, M. “Is White South African Old Testament Scholarship African?” *Bulletin for Old Testament Studies in Africa*, No. 12 (2002), p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Naudé, C.F.B. 2005. “Reconciliation.” In Hansen, L.D. (ed), *The Legacy of Beyers Naudé*. Stellenbosch: SUN PRéSS, p. 139.

With the flowering of Black Consciousness, which millions of blacks – Christians and non-Christians – experienced especially between 1975 and 1986, Oom Bey was concerned about the emergence of a future where this development may create a dilemma for the gospel of Christ. He said to the young black graduates of the Federal Theological Seminary in 1977:

“The strength of your own convictions and the depth of your own feelings as a black could easily lead you into the temptation of so identifying yourself with the cry of your people that a political role will take precedence over the proclamation of the Gospel. It is not impossible to visualise a situation arising in your own life where **Christian values are forced into subservient positions that the voice of Christ could be silenced** as the cry of Amandla rises to a crescendo when political liberation is realised!”<sup>12</sup> [Naudé’s emphasis]

For this reason Oom Bey admonished the graduates to “decide on the nature and the extent of their identification with the people in the struggle for total liberation”, while not forgetting that:

“when this hour of political liberation dawns, Christ and His message of transformation of human life and of liberation of mankind [sic] stands above all political policy, all over social systems, all economic structures. He stands as Lord over all human systems, all historic events, none of which can ever contain the fullness of the life which only the kingdom of God offers to all men.”<sup>13</sup>

No extensive empirical research is needed to come to the conclusion that that “hour” visualised by Oom Bey in 1977 has come. Very few ministers today preach about moral decay, escalating crime rates, domestic violence, the liberalisation of abortion legislation to provide for reasons other than medical concerns, the slow pace of service delivery, lack of commitment on the side of (Christian) workers at their places of work, failures to deliver on promises on the part of Christian politicians in South Africa, the need to help the poor, greediness, unjust profit maximisation and xenophobia, to name but some of the challenges facing this country and continent.

The liberated South Africa confronts us with what Tony Balcomb of the University of KwaZulu Natal describes as “[a] *multiplicity of stories from various segments of the society competing for the moral high ground*”, which has produced, what JD Hunter

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<sup>12</sup> Naudé, CFB. 1977. “Christian Ministry in a Time of Crisis.” *Pro Veritate*. Vol. 15, No. 11. p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

called, “culture wars”.<sup>14</sup> Different groups (including Christians) are expressing different sets of values based on their self-interest. Balcomb decries a situation where students, feeling so liberated in post-apartheid South Africa, ransacked university property because only R300 000 was given to them by the university authorities for their freshers’ (first-year students) party! To them political liberation means free booze. Speaking at an URSCA conference entitled “The Church and Moral Life” in Wellington on 26 July 2005, Nico Koopman, professor in Christian Ethics at the University of Stellenbosch, lamented the growing lack of concern over moral decay and the “choices” that people are making in (South) Africa today. Black theologians are increasingly becoming “apologists” for African values and worldviews, completely removed from the average whites in South Africa and difficult for them to comprehend. The question Oom Bey left for us and the generation to come in a situation like this is: what is the nature and extent of our identification with the various sets of un-Christian values in the liberated South Africa?

#### *2.4 A future of growing economic hardship and social unrest*

Fourthly, Oom Bey warned against a future when there would be growing unemployment, poverty and social unrest. He saw that, with the unrealistic policy of separate development being in place at the time, a time would come when South Africa would pay dearly for it. Today unemployment is a problem all over Africa. But because the apartheid system put in place structures that subjected the majority of South Africans to low-quality education, it is not surprising that unemployment and economic inequalities are, among other things, relatively speaking more severe in South Africa than in many other African countries. This is one way in which South Africa is now paying for the structures it put into place in the past. The months of July and August, the traditional months of negotiations for wage increases, can almost be described as months of civil unrest in the country. Protest marches and industrial action make headlines in the media. The question is whether our younger generation of ministers is prepared to face the dawning of this “hour” of strikes and protest marches – this time not against apartheid policies, but because of the lack of service delivery, low wages and the closure of major South African firms resulting in the retrenchment of thousands of people with no hope of re-employment in the years to come. Oom Bey, in the abovementioned speech, warned the young seminary graduates of an imminent future of growing unemployment and poverty. He asked them to decide what their role was going to be and what the demands of Christ for them would be in such a situation. Have *we* made a choice about what our role is now and is going to be?

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<sup>14</sup> Hunter, J.D. 1991. *Culture Wars, the Struggle to Define America*, New York, Basic Books. Cited by Balcomb, A. “Culture Wars and the issue of public morality on Canaan’s side of the Jordan,” *Scriptura*, No. 82:1 (2003), p. 15.

### *2.5 Future irrelevancy of the Church*

Finally, Oom Bey spoke of a future when the Church would increasingly become irrelevant in the public sphere in (South) Africa. At that point Oom Bey was speaking about the increasing rate at which the “credibility and liberating power of the message” which the Church was proclaiming in (South) Africa was being put to the test.<sup>15</sup> On 16 March 1977, when Oom Bey visualised this future, an “increasing number of laity, both white and black” had what he described as a “growing conviction of the irrelevance of the Church as an institution, and the loss of its influence on many people.” According to him, this specifically was the case because the various claims the churches had made concerning our fellowship and oneness in Christ - our sharing of spiritual gifts as well as material privileges - were never seen to be substantiated in the lives of their members.<sup>16</sup> Rather, what was seen was an enduring desire for separation and exploitation with no commitment to live any of the many good biblical virtues the Church was proclaiming.

To those in detention there was not much meaning they could discern from a highly scholarly doctrinal sermon. It seems hardly possible that detainees would believe or continue to believe any gospel devoid of relevance to the situation of their oppression. A sermon without “a human face,” to use the famous phrase of the Archbishop of Cape Town (CPSA), Njongukulu Ndungane, would be equally irrelevant in the present South Africa. What are the demands of Christ for us as Christians in (South) Africa today, in a situation of massive unemployment and continuing job losses; a lack of service delivery; forceful removals and farm grabbing in Zimbabwe; a growing HIV/Aids pandemic; escalating rates of drop-outs in tertiary institutions; moral decay; dishonest politicians who give hefty tithes every Sunday, etc.? As long as churches are not able to address these issues, both at congregational and synod levels, they will be irrelevant to the present and future (South) African public sphere.

### *3. Future possibilities*

As was seen above, Oom Bey visualised different faces of the future. We now live to see the fulfilment of his visions and prophecy. For his part, he did not only warn the church and government of his day; he also tried his best to cause change and to prepare church and government to face the dawning of a future “hour of disaster”. In conclusion, we also can ask ourselves: what can you and I do at this “hour of disaster”?

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<sup>15</sup> Naudé, 1977: 6.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

### 3.1 *True reconciliation and unity – remembering the past*

Firstly, we have to swing into action in order to bring about *true reconciliation and unity in our country, continent and churches*. In this regard we must always be mindful of the circumstances that brought us to this point, a point at which we even have to hold endless talks about the need for a united community, especially within a Christian community. The questions for reflection will then be: how come we have a Dutch Reformed *family* of churches and not a Dutch Reformed Church? Why a “Uniting Reformed Church” and not a “United Reformed Church” or simply a “Reformed Church” in whatever province we live? Why a “Uniting Presbyterian Church” and not simply a “Presbyterian Church in (Southern) Africa”?

If truly we have come to the point that we can identify the historical factors that brought about this categorical naming of churches of the same confessional background and origin, we may have moved a giant step towards unity. Remember, our history shows that *there is something in a name*. In this case, what are contained in our names are *divisions* or, rather, lack of unity. If we have not come to the point where we can publicly confess that our having to worship in or belong to separate churches within the same Christian tradition means that the credibility of our gospel of true reconciliation and unity has been utterly shattered, we are going nowhere with our seemingly committed but nevertheless fruitless journey towards reconciliation in (South) Africa.

### 3.2 *Looking at the present and the future in the same way*

Secondly, for us to be able to collectively deal with the challenges of our day, be they the HIV/Aids pandemic, gender-related violence, poverty, etc., we must be willing to *see in the same way*. Dirkie Smit, Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Stellenbosch, once said that one of the effects of the apartheid system was that South Africans did not see in the same way.<sup>17</sup> This was the problem Oom Bey faced with his own people and church. Oom Bey, his church and the government of that time did not see (South) Africa and its challenges in the same way. Therefore, they did not see the future (South) Africa in the same way. For those of us living today in (South) Africa, the challenge we must face at the outset is to try to see our churches, our continent, its challenges and the future of our people in the same way. Only when we are able to see what is happening in (South) Africa today in order to be able to discern what God is doing and what our responsibility is in (South) Africa today, will we be able to deal with the challenges that hold back our progress.

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<sup>17</sup> Smit, D. 2002. “Seeing Things Differently”. In: Holness, L. & R. Wustenburg (eds) *Theology in Dialogue: the Impact of Arts, Humanities, and Science on Contemporary Religious Thought. Essays in Honour of John De Gruchy*, Cape Town: David Philip, pp.271-289.

### *3.3 Taking responsibility in the present and future*

Thirdly, related to the previous point, *we must realise that everyone's business is nobody's business*. We are gradually adapting an attitude of shifting of blame in addressing the challenges before us. It is always other people who are not doing their jobs properly. It is always others who are creating problems for us. For our own part, we do not consider ourselves as part of our problem. This generation and the one to come must own and own up to its responsibilities. Instead of preoccupying ourselves with a debate about what the government is doing or failing to do – though that too is important – we must ask ourselves what the Church is doing or needs to do, but unfortunately is not doing. Instead of concentrating on the failure to embrace reconciliation and unity by another church or churches, we must take up the task of walking the path of reconciliation ourselves. The question is no longer what the General Synods or their moderators are saying, doing or failing to say or do. It is the question of what individual Christians think about each other and the demands Christ makes on them in such circumstances. It could have been a waste of your precious time sitting here today, had it been that Oom Bey sat in his comfort zone saying, over a glass of cold wine, “we do not need any reconciliation more than what we already have”. Martin Luther King Jr once said that “the ultimate measure of a man [and a woman] is not where he [she] stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he [she] stands at times of challenge and controversy”. The ultimate measure of the person of Beyers Naudé is where he stood at times of great controversy. If we see any good in the life of Oom Bey, we should be willing to ask ourselves where we are standing at *this* time of challenge and controversy in our Church, country and continent.

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Beyers Naudé

In two very important respects your ministry will differ from that of any other group of black ministers in South Africa who have offered themselves for the service of the ministry in their respective churches.

1. Future events

- 1.1 You are entering the ministry in a **time of serious crisis** in the history of our country. It is a period of great upheaval, of increasing tension between black and white (also black and black), of ever-growing oppression against all who the government believes are threatening the security of the state and the identity of the white man, especially the Afrikaner.

The Church as an institution will be deeply involved in and affected by these events. The majority of the whites at present seem to believe that peace and calm have returned to this land. You and I know that, as far as the black community is concerned, the upheavals of the past months are but the outward sign of a movement of deep stirrings towards freedom which can no longer be suppressed by force.

- 1.2 During your lifetime, I believe, you are going to participate in the most important process of political and social change which this country has ever experienced. Despite denials by the powers-that-be, the present system of racial oppression is like a patient desperately clinging to life and will fight to stave off the dying day – but it is of no avail: he will not survive. No political or police expertise, frantically administering emergency medicines at the bedside is going to save his life. He is destined to disappear, and with his death we will view the end of an oppressive rule and the transition towards political liberation which millions of blacks have been looking forward to for decades. I believe this transition is going to be a turbulent, painful one – like that of the birth of a child, too long delayed, but you are going to witness this birth: **the appearance of a new independent and liberated state called Azania.**

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<sup>1</sup> Address to the graduates of the Federal Theological Seminary at Edendale, Pietermaritzburg, 16 March 1977. Originally published in *Pro Veritate*, April 1977, pp. 4-6.



2. Your reaction to these events

As theological tutors and students, and as future ministers of the gospel, you should ask how you are preparing yourselves for the crisis situation of this pre-liberation period which is part of your present life, as well as for the immediate post-liberation period which could come sooner than many realise. There are four possible ways in which clergy, present and future, could react to this situation:

2.1 You could continue with a **traditional form of ministry** as if nothing of great portent is happening: (a) The preaching of one sermon after the other with little, if any, relevance to the crucial social or political issues of the day: in other words a sermon which Radio Bantu or the SABC would be very happy to broadcast; (b) consecrating marriages, hopefully in accordance with Christ's demand for the sanctity of marriage, but always in obedience to the dictates of the racial laws of the state; (c) faithfully confirming new believers, ministering to the sick, burying the dead and comforting the bereaved. I do not wish to suggest that this form of ministry is not valid, but what image of the gospel of Christ and of His Kingdom is being conveyed to the world by such a ministry if no other dimension is added? Such a form of priestly service could be seen to be so timeless, so generalised and so unspecific as to be largely meaningless.

2.2 The tensions of the time and the demands for relevant leadership might create such uncertainty and conflict in your own mind and heart that you might be tempted to seek refuge from your feelings of insecurity in a **spiritualised ministry**, a persistent call to individual pietism or evangelism largely devoid of social concern, or a flight into blissful charismatic experiences.

I do not wish to suggest that such piety, prayer, or charismatic experiences should not form a valid part of the Christian life – but what image of the gospel of Christ and His Kingdom is created through a ministry which over-emphasises the abovementioned traits to the serious neglect of other important qualities of Christian life?

2.3 In the rising of Black Consciousness which millions of blacks have experienced during recent years there is reflected very clearly the growing expectation of liberation from the system of racial oppression. This new force of Black Consciousness creates a serious dilemma, but also a tremendous opportunity for every minister: to decide the nature and extent of his identification with his people in their struggle for total liberation. The strength of your own convictions and the depth of your own feelings as a black, could easily lead you into the temptation of so identifying yourself with the cry of your people that a political role will take precedence over the proclamation of the gospel. It is not impossible to visualise a situation arising in your own life where **Christian values are forced into such subservient positions that the**

**voice of Christ could be silenced** as the cry of Amandla! rises to a crescendo when political liberation is realised. And who could blame you if you uncritically identify such political freedom with Christian liberation: didn't the Afrikaners do the same when the yoke of British imperialist oppression became too heavy to bear? But do not forget, when this hour of political liberation dawns, that Christ and His message of transformation of human life and of liberation of mankind stand above all political policy, over all social systems, all economic structures. He stands as Lord over all human systems, all historic events, none of which can ever contain the fullness of the life which only the Kingdom of God offers to all men.

- 2.4 I wish to mention a fourth reaction which to me seems to be the nearest to the demands of the gospel for a valid Christian ministry. You could consciously look at the course of present events and future developments and prepare yourself spiritually, theologically, intellectually and emotionally for these events in the realisation that God wants you to make some **positive contribution, to the furtherance of His Kingdom among all the people of South Africa**. This preparation would require that you inform yourself first of all, of the most crucial issues that your people in particular, but also the country as a whole, will have to face within the next decade. Therefore it is vitally important that you should ask yourself this question: **What are the most pressing problems that I as a man of God will have to assist in solving?**

Furthermore, I believe it to be of vital importance that you should ask yourself what Christ will demand of you, as a human being, as a Christian, as a theologian or pastor, as a leader in your community in the role that you will have to play in determining the outcome of these problems.

### 3. The main issues

I believe that there are four important basic issues which will have to be faced in the first years of your ministry.

#### *3.1 The issue of growing unemployment, poverty and want*

South Africa is paying dearly for the expensive costs of the unrealisable policies of separate development. With the cost of living spiralling, ever-increasing taxes, a rising rate of inflation, lesser investments and other inhibiting economic factors, unemployment will increase in leaps and bounds, with millions being forced to live in dire poverty with all the social unrest resulting from this. History has proved that the lower income groups are always the first to be adversely affected and the last to be meaningfully liberated. How is this situation going to affect the nature of your ministry? Are you going to set a priority on the erection of

expensive places of worship? Are you passively going to accept the economic deprivation thus created, or are you willing to involve yourself and your local community in programmes of self-liberation, self-reliance and self-development?

### *3.2 The struggle for political liberation*

The events of Soweto, June 16, 1976 and what has been happening since by way of raids, detentions, arrests, trials, convictions, acquittals, with hundreds of young blacks fleeing the country, are the outward sign of a deep inward struggle for political liberation which your people are waging. We are currently witnessing the display of a monster of power of a dictatorial regime that is intent upon crushing all its opponents, but that in the long run will inevitably destroy itself – with millions of innocent people, both black and white, being the victims of ideological madness. The Internal Security Act, the Terrorism Act and the newly introduced Newspaper Bill are part of an ever-increasing number of oppressive legal measures.

The inevitable opposition to such measures will include demonstrations, strikes, sabotage and urban guerrilla warfare with all the conflicts and clashes resulting from that.

Every black congregation is going to be affected by this struggle and many individuals will be involved, directly or indirectly, in attempts to achieve political liberation for their people. Your whole ministry will be deeply affected by these events and I believe it to be of vital importance that you should already seriously consider what Christ is demanding of you in your witness and contribution to this struggle.

### *3.3 Growing estrangement and resulting polarisation*

Every priest is already facing this growing estrangement and the resulting polarisation between black and white in our community. Only a totally insensitive human being could be unaware of the fast-growing frustration and bitterness amongst your own people with the racial policies of our country and the attitudes of many members of the white community, and the challenge which this tension is presenting to the unity of believers in a multiracial church. Many of us are aware of the insistent question being raised by many young blacks, when they ask this penetrating question: **Is there still a place for the white man in the Christian Church? If so, is there still a place for me as a black?** Equally, we are aware of the hardening of attitudes on the part of many whites and the tragedy of their lack of understanding of the message which the black community has been trying to convey to South Africa. You are being forced into a very invidious position where, on the one hand, there will be the insistent militant demand of black youths for full solidarity and identification with their ideal for black liberation, whilst at the same time the hardening attitudes of white church membership is creating a

nearly intolerable situation. The basic theological question which you will have to face, together with all ministers of the Christian faith in our country, both black and white, will be this: **Will the power of the reconciling love of Christ be strong enough to unite these strongly opposing forces? Or will it be swept away in the forces of political revolution?**

### *3.4 The claim of ideologies versus the power of the gospel*

Another issue which I believe already forms the basis of lively discussion is the ideology of Marxism, not necessarily out of the sincere belief that such an ideology will be the final answer to the needs of the black community, but out of exasperation that the present racial policies of our country can no longer be endured. Knowing very little about the oppressive nature and practice of Communist regimes, especially those of Russian origin, some tend to visualise a falsely optimistic picture of life under Communist rule. Others are willing as a form of strategy to accept the assistance offered by Communist countries to achieve their goal of liberation, in the hope that after independence they will be strong enough to assert their political autonomy and economic independence.

This discussion includes the debate on an economic system which could more clearly express a concept of justice for the community than the present capitalist system which South Africa practises. Anybody knowing the feelings of blacks in South Africa is aware of the serious dissatisfaction with our present day economic system of free enterprise. Strong interest is expressed in gathering all relevant information regarding the possible alternatives of forms of socialism such as those practised by China or certain countries on the continent of Africa.

In this struggle to find a more acceptable system, the Christian Church, including every minister, should inform himself of the true nature of such systems with a view to evaluate them in the light of the gospel and of the Christian faith. This is an issue which can no longer be ignored by Christians, both black and white, in South Africa. When I read the slogan on stickers on motor cars reading: "Jesus is the answer", I have been tempted to ask the inmates of such a car: Do you know what His answer is when listening to the claims which are being made by capitalism on the one hand, and Marxism on the other? Do you sincerely believe (as I do) that the true answer is not to be found in either of these systems, but that only as the truth of the Kingdom of God and its realisation on earth is being enacted more fully and joyously by all Christians will the true answer be found?

## *4. The demand of Christ*

In this struggle for a new society that will be more in accordance with God's demand for justice and human dignity, Christ is calling you as His disciple, His message bearer, His delegated representative. He, the Christ who has laid hold of

your life at some time in the past, and called you to His service, is laying claim to your total life and loyalty:

#### *4.1 Upon your personal life*

A life of Christian simplicity, true piety, moral rectitude and spiritual vitality, where your personal example will play a decisive role in your ministry. Your preaching, your pastoral care, your Christian leadership will to a very large measure be determined by such personal demands. Equally you will very soon discover the demand of Christ for offering strong leadership, displaying unflinching courage and facing the willingness of voluntary suffering and sacrifice in the face ever-increasing political surveillance and persecution.

#### *4.2 Upon your ministry*

The situation of growing tension and emerging conflict will also be used by Christ to lay a special claim upon your ministry as a **messenger of His gospel**. It will be a claim by Christ upon your theological proclamation, upon your political involvement and upon your Christian identification.

##### *4.2.1 Your theological proclamation*

What is the nature of your preaching going to be? Paul, in writing to the Corinthians regarding the nature of his proclamation, states clearly: *“For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified* – but what does this mean in the South African context of 1977, after June 16, 1976? What is the real message, the open invitation, the divine judgement of this Christ, crucified, for each of us, for His Church, for South African society today? Will we preach a theology of liberation and hope, not devoid of social and political content, but filled with the real meaning of the gospel as it becomes more relevant to the struggle in which we are involved?

Let your message be so authentic, so relevant, so meaningful in its portrayal of the living Christ that people will know: this man has struggled to make the Christ of the New Testament the living Christ of today for those of us living in Umlazi, in Sibasa, in Langa – yes, even in the remotest corner of a rural homeland. Preach in such a way that at the end of your life and its ministry you may be able to say: “I too, have proclaimed the full counsel of God to the flock which He has entrusted to me.”

##### *4.2.2 Your political involvement*

I believe it to be of vital importance at the outset of your ministry to make out what the nature of your political involvement is going to be. You will have to decide whether you believe, on the basis of the gospel, that any relevant proclamation and practising of the Christian faith is possible without becoming

involved in politics. I do not believe this to be possible: no religion – least of all the Christian faith – can be kept out of politics. On the other hand, it is important to recognise that the Christian faith should never be identified with any specific political policy, social structure or economic system. No such policy ever fulfils the demands of the Kingdom of God. Christ as Lord stands above all systems and structures and therefore the Christian should always adopt a positive critical attitude towards them.

The minister as man of God should at all times proclaim the biblical demands of justice and freedom to all, regardless of station or power. Applying the criteria of the gospel, his proclamation of God's salvation and judgement should, without favour or prejudice, apply equally to the policies and practices of Idi Amin, Samora Machel, John Vorster or Kaiser Matanzima. Give praise where praise is due in accordance with the spirit and the mind of Christ; but equally pronounce judgement where this is demanded in the Name of the Lord.

This approach in our ministry is of special relevance to the emerging struggle for political power in South Africa. The transition from white minority rule to majority rule is not going to be an easy one: Man's longing (and lust) for power, stimulated by the many false positions created by the government through its policy of racial and ethnical division, will involve South Africa in a bitter struggle between white and black, and between black and black (as we are witnessing in other parts of Africa). What is Christ's demand to you under these circumstances? **Which is your role going to be: a partisan political role in open support of a specific group or a Christian leadership role which recognises both the good and the bad in each party, policy or person?**

#### 4.2.3 Your Christian identification

In the crisis you will probably be confronted in your congregation or your denomination by growing numbers of politically conscious youth, crying out for liberation; by parents and adults in distress on behalf of their children; by overwhelming social needs, including economic deprivation, hunger and want of your community – and many other problems. Many evenings as you come home your heart and soul will cry out:

“Oh god, give me the wisdom to discover your will for myself in this time of crisis, give me the courage to continue in your service, give me the love to forgive those who oppress my people, give me the strength to fight against the evil system of those who deny us our human dignity and our basic human rights, give me the fortitude to protest against those who exploit the labour of our people for selfish gain and who use every means to maintain their selfish control of power.”

### *4.3 Upon your denomination:*

As I read the situation, it seems that every church in South Africa should be challenged to declare its stand in word and deed on the following urgent issues:

#### 4.3.1 Reconciliation

I am aware that many blacks, including black Christians, have become increasingly suspicious when whites approach them with a plea for reconciliation. They state unequivocally: you whites want reconciliation while we blacks seek liberation, and only when you are prepared to identify yourselves with our goal for liberation can there be true reconciliation. Without that, any such plea could never be realised.

If we have a clear and common understanding of what true liberation implies, I would fully agree with the above viewpoint. As somebody who belongs to an organisation where for many years we have stated clearly the demand for reconciliation based on justice, I am fully aware of the challenge which this situation presents to you and to your denominations. On the one hand, there is the growing demand for action towards liberation emanating from the young militant blacks: on the other hand, there is the increased hardening of attitudes and rejection of black aspirations and demands by a substantial section of the white Christian community – and both of these belong to the same church and, in a few instances, to the same parish or congregation. *What will be Christ's demand of you under these circumstances? How is your church, facing up to the issue of army chaplains, of conscientious objection, of marriage officers bound to implement unjust racial laws of the state, of the support for victims of political oppression?*

#### 4.3.2 Relevance

Today, as never before, the Church in South Africa is being tested regarding the relevance, credibility and liberating power of the message which it proclaims. An increasing number of laity, both white and black, have a growing conviction of the irrelevance of the Church as an institution, and the loss of its influence on many people. Claims which the Church has made regarding our true brotherhood in Christ, our unity despite all differences, our sharing of spiritual gifts as well as material privileges – these and many others have been exposed as largely unsubstantiated. **As the crisis deepens and as the day of liberation dawns, the Church will be challenged as never before to substantiate the claims of its Master that He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. I believe that Christ has the power and the urgent longing to lead us as a Christian community into a new understanding of what Christian commitment and Christian relevance mean at this time in the history of His Church in our country. I do not know what the answers will lead us to, but this I know: In Him is all the fulfilment of all the aspirations and the hopes of all the oppressed, the imprisoned, the blind, the**

**millions who are shackled by the forces of evil. He stands at the entry of a new time, a new period in the history of our country and He beckons us to follow Him as He leads us into true and full liberation.**



# THE BELHAR CONFESSION: EMBODYING THE FUTURE IN THE LIGHT OF THE WITNESS OF OOM BEY

Anlené Taljaard<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction

The theology that has been done in South Africa on the past, present and future challenges facing the country suggests that they are, on the one hand, very complex and, in fact, almost impossible to describe. However, on the other hand, these challenges are in another sense very simple and straightforward.

In this article I want to reflect on the history of South Africa and some of the theological responses to the situation in the country under apartheid. I will look at these with particular reference to the life and the witness of Beyers Naudé. These reflections prompt very direct and straightforward questions to be put to the Christian community of today. They also direct us, as believers in Christ, towards a future of integrity that should have a concrete influence on daily realities.

I hope to show that the efforts and interpretations of the past and present contexts in the light of Scripture can be reconciled with the words of the Belhar Confession, and that the efforts and interpretations of the Belhar Confession could become the confession in honour of the One Lord, as well as the hope and cry of Christian communities for a just future for all. In addressing the Christian community we do need to acknowledge that we also are, albeit in humble and inadequate ways, seeking to honour the Triune God.

It must also be remembered that the interpretation of history and of the Confession of Belhar proposed here is only one among a variety of possible interpretations, opinions and critiques. The underlying aim of the article is to point towards the challenges, the possibilities, the strength and the beauty of the living Word of God as witnessed in the life of Beyers Naudé life as well as by the Words of the Belhar Confession. In other words, in order to adequately confess our faith today, we will need to rely on the guidance of both the wisdom of past witnesses and the words of the Confession of Belhar.

## 2. The witness of Beyers Naudé

Reflecting on the past and trying to understand the context of, and the tension within, theological thinking about realities in South Africa serves as a starting point for dealing with the witness of Beyers Naudé. In retrospect it is sometimes

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easier to identify and to suggest appropriate responses to past challenges, while at the same time forgetting the enormous tension these challenges caused and the courage these choices demanded from people at the time. They all had to deal with the complexities of their day. They had to find a way of seeing through the density of arguments and realities in order to perceive a different reality that would serve as a clear and unambiguous reflection of the gospel.

When one reads an article written by Durand in 1982 entitled “Discovering the Implications of Reconciliation” (1982: 20-24), one comes deeply under the impression of the personal struggle of the writer to see, understand and interpret realities in South Africa in the light of the gospel. His own questions mainly concerned the hermeneutical interpretation of Scripture in the events of history, the contextualization of its message, and searching for a strategy to voice his theological convictions. Durand then refers to Beyers Naudé, whom he names as one of the few theologians who preferred the strategy of working “from the outside” in fear of in any way compromising his point of view. For him Naudé thus became one of the theologians who were “outspoken and uncomplicated in their rejection of apartheid on biblical grounds” (Durand, 1982: 23). It is also important to note that these views of Beyers Naudé grew from a firm conviction, based on a hermeneutical understanding of Scripture, that he was compelled to rather obey God than men.<sup>2</sup> Durand also writes that during his *own* personal theological journey he had developed “a growing conviction that the prevalent attitude in the Afrikaans-speaking churches towards upholding South Africa’s political and social system on theological grounds should be unmasked in very clear and unambiguous terms as a distortion and aberration of the Reformed faith” (1982: 20).

In the light of the above, Beyers Naudé’s life and witness then serve as an example of a person who clearly and unambiguously unmasked the political and social system on theological grounds. The choices he made showed that he firmly believed that the Reformed faith was indeed distorted and it is therefore not surprising that very often Naudé is referred to as a figure of resistance, solidarity and hope.<sup>3</sup>

### *2.1 A witness to resistance*

In revisiting history it becomes clear that Beyers Naudé’s **resistance** was to a heresy. He publicly warned that the interpretation of Scripture espoused by the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) endangered the message of the gospel. One

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. sermon preached by Beyers Naudé in September 1963 entitled “Obedience to God” in Hansen, LD (ed.). 2005. *The Legacy of Beyers Naudé*, Stellenbosch: SUN PReSS, pp.25-29

<sup>3</sup> For an account of the life of Beyers Naudé, cf. Villa-Vicencio, Charles and John W. de Gruchy (eds). 1985. *Resistance and Hope. South African essays in honour of Beyers Naudé*. Cape Town: David Phillip, pp. 3 – 13.

interesting and unfortunate aspect of this espousal was that the DRC interpreted the biblical theme of “a chosen people” as referring to a specific ethnic group, in the case of South Africa to the Afrikaner, and not to the whole of the family of Christ.<sup>4</sup> This was one of the ways in which the Bible was employed in order to create an ideology of exclusion. It established a collective identity built on an anthropological understanding of race and not on an identity in Christ. In this identity group members were loyal towards one another and viewed outsiders as a threat.<sup>5</sup> This race-based identity was linked to the exclusive Afrikaner identity and this “tribal identity” was endorsed by the Dutch Reformed Church’s interpretation of Scripture.

## 2.2 *A witness to solidarity*

Beyers Naudé’s **solidarity** was with the oppressed, with the ‘other’ brothers and sisters in Christ who did not form part of the *Afrikanervolk*. In this act of solidarity he in fact also embraced a broader ecumenical identity that enriched his own theological thinking and life of faith.<sup>6</sup> On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the foundation of the Belydenekring in Mayfair, Johannesburg, on 8 December 1984, Naudé started his speech with the following question: “Which South Africa are we talking about? This is the question which we have to ask and answer before we enter into a discussion on the meaning of confessing the faith.”<sup>7</sup> He continued by asking:

“Are we talking about South Africa of the overcrowded match-box homes, empty schools, protesting students, teargas and bullets, injury and death? Are we talking about families planning their Christmas parties and gifts at a holiday resort or overseas – or are we talking

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<sup>4</sup> Beyers Naudé, for example, in an address delivered in 1967, “The Afrikaner and Race Relations”, says that “the one factor moulding the attitude of the Afrikaner has been his explicable but nevertheless unacceptable identification of his people as ‘a chosen people’ with Israel, the chosen people of God of the Old Testament...This view of the Afrikaner people as a chosen nation called to a special God-given mission and manifest destiny as ordained by God was born out of a totally wrong interpretation of the Old Testament which led to a distortion of God’s purpose” (Naudé, 2005d: 57).

<sup>5</sup> “I would like to mention in explaining the Afrikaner’s traditional attitude to race is *fear*...For the ordinary Afrikaner his traditional enemy always had a black face or included one – and it is this fear which determined so much of his attitude and policy towards his non-white neighbour in this country” (Naudé, 2005d: 59).

<sup>6</sup> “While most of the Western nations were experiencing the changes inherent in situations of increased communications, of rapid social and economic change, causing violent spiritual and intellectual upheaval, the Afrikaner community, through its secluded and often self-imposed isolation, was largely unaware of all these forces which were changing the outlook and relations of millions of people, including the relations between white and non-white.” (*Ibid.*).

<sup>7</sup> Beyers Naudé, 2005b, “Confessing the Faith in South Africa Today.” In Hansen, LD (ed.) 2005. *The Legacy of Beyers Naudé*, Stellenbosch: SUN PRESS, p. 127.

about families in poverty, hunger and want, barely being able to prepare a full meal for Christmas day?" (Naudé 2005b:127)

The identity of those 'with whom' we are in solidarity have major consequences for an answer to the question as to the face of the God we are seeking. The identity of those 'with whom' we are in solidarity challenges our identity in Christ and Beyers Naudé knew that one couldn't confess faith in God while, at the same time, oppression is being justified by and through the practices of such a faith.<sup>8</sup>

### *2.3 A witness to hope*

Beyers Naudé's hope flowed from a firm knowledge that through the power and grace of God changes in society and life are indeed possible and worth sacrificing for. The strength of his convictions and the magnitude of his courage painted a picture of hope that encouraged those who believed in and challenged those that doubted the possibility of a different society. In a lecture given by Naudé on 12 June 1973 in Durban as part of a series of SPROCAS lectures one finds an example of this when Naudé addressed the black community in South Africa with the following words:

"But we wish to plead with you, in the unwavering belief that the day will surely come and is already coming when your humanity will be fully recognised, your rights will be fully ensured and your people will be truly free."<sup>9</sup>

### *3. Possible responses to the witness of Beyers Naudé*

Beyers Naudé's legacy of witness to resistance, solidarity and hope confronts our and future generations with the following questions: Do we understand Beyers Naudé's acts in the past of resistance, solidarity and hope as acts of confession of his faith, and will this particular confession of faith have any influence on the faith that we accept and pass on to our children? And, in confessing our faith today, what do *we* resist, with whom are *we* in solidarity, and what do *we* hope for?

In order to give adequate answers to these three questions, it is essential to name and describe the present times and current challenges. The new generation is faced with theological tensions and choices in the same crucial way as the previous generation was. It is the task and responsibility of theologians, as members of the Body of Christ, to give guidance in identifying theological tensions and deciding the appropriate responses to these.

According to Serene Jones, for Calvin theological discourse was marked by a double purpose: it wishes to bear witness to the revelation of God in Scripture, but

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<sup>8</sup> Naudé, 2005b: 127- 130.

<sup>9</sup> Beyers Naudé. 2005e. "The Need for Political Reform." In Hansen, 2005: 98.

also to do so in a language capable of moving the hearts, minds and wills of its audience toward an ever deepening life of faith.<sup>10</sup> Jones argues that Calvin saw the purpose of the theologian as an effort to faithfully persuade and to build up the community in an accommodating manner. The theologian needs to retell the gospel in such a way that members can participate in building the covenant. The theologian therefore strengthens the community of faith not only in what they *hear*, but also on a level where they are *drawn into* and being *shaped by* the Word of God.

Jones also states that the theologian must be very aware of the current use of power. He/she needs to ask who is being empowered, and who is being judged as ungodly and why?<sup>11</sup> Such a worldview, which is directed towards God's revelation, often stands in tension with the worldview of the current culture. Theologians have to be aware of such conflicting positions and live amidst this tension with integrity.

This is also what one saw in the life of Beyers Naudé. On the lifting of his banning order he wrote the article, "My seven lean years," in which he said, amongst other things: "I consciously refused to allow the banning order to accomplish its intended goal." He then listed six points of conviction<sup>12</sup> that had kept him and Ilse, his wife, from having feelings of bitterness, hatred or revenge.<sup>13</sup> The sixth of these was that: "It would never rob me of the deep conviction, inspired by my Christian faith and my sense of justice as I discovered time and again through the pronouncement of the Old and the New Testament, that freedom will come to our land, that the system of apartheid will eventually crumble and disappear, and that our country and our people will be free."<sup>14</sup>

The possible response to the witness of Beyers Naudé then becomes the response of the visible Church, formed and shaped by the preaching and hearing of the Word and a community who should be able to live with conviction and integrity in the reality of their contexts and times.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Jones, Serene. 1995. *Calvin and the Rhetoric of Piety*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, p.187

<sup>11</sup> Jones, 1995: 191.

<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, these convictions also brought him to the conclusion that: "Through God's grace I would never allow this banning to break my spirit, to distort my freedom of mind, or my concern for justice." In Naudé, CFB. 1985. "My seven lean years," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, June 1985, p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Naudé, 1985: 12..

<sup>15</sup> According to John de Gruchy (1985:16), "...[t]o claim that the church in South Africa has considerable social significance does not necessarily mean that the church is an instrument of social transformation leading to a more just social order; it might equally mean that the church is standing in the way of such change. I believe that both are true. The Church in South Africa is both an agent of just social transformation and a stumbling block in the way of such transformation."

In 1986 the former daughter church of the Dutch Reformed Church, then called the Dutch Reformed Mission Church and later the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa, responded to the challenges of South Africa in the words of the Confession of Belhar.<sup>16</sup>

What remains remarkable about the Belhar confession is that precisely at a time of the most horrific violence being perpetrated against oppressed people, they turned to the Word of God and confessed their faith in the Triune God. They confessed that they believe in a forgiving God and subsequently saw themselves as sinners and forgivers. During this time of turmoil and in a state of emergency where security forces killed and tortured neighbours, families and friends, they had the courage to proclaim that the Church stands for unity, reconciliation and justice. It was in times like these that they confessed their belief in the message of the gospel as one where faith is the only prerequisite for membership of the Church; that we all are united in Christ and therefore all able to be reconciled as brothers and sisters in Christ; that the Church does not support any practices of injustice. During this time of gross injustice, when some churches served as stumbling blocks in social transformation, the Uniting Reformed Church realised that everything depended on it publicly confessing its faith in the Triune God.

### *3.1 The Confession of Belhar as response to the witness of Beyers Naudé*

In the Confession of Belhar the reality of Beyers's witness is present. The unequivocal "No!" to this particular scripture interpretation as is witnessed in his life is embedded in the "Yes!" of the confession. The latter's "Yes" gives the new generation ample ways to become a church that serves as an agent of change, as an agent of social transformation. This responds to Beyers Naudé's legacy of a struggle against a Church that served as a stumbling block in social transformation.

More specifically, the Confession of Belhar serves the next generation in three ways. Firstly, it links its future efforts at social transformation to the Church, the community knowingly belonging to God. Secondly, it confesses its faith in the words of this confession; the next generation could fill the world with possibilities for healing and growth which precisely are not the products of its own willpower, but flow forth from the strength and abilities of its Saviour, Jesus Christ. Finally, this act of confessing keeps the vision and the embodiment of unity, reconciliation and justice alive as more than a mere dream, but as the reality of the Kingdom of God, waiting to become more visible through the Church in the world.

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Die Belydenis 1986, NG Sendingkerk in SA, Bybelse Versoening en 'n Statuter Geskeide Gemeenskap*. n.d. Especially contributions of authors Bam, Smit and Loff in this edition.

### 3.2 *Confessing with Beyers Naudé in the words of Belhar*

In this article I choose to link the life and witness of Beyers Naudé with the Belhar Confession and do so in a very specific way. I will compare his life of resistance with the ongoing urgency to confess the need for unity; his life of solidarity with the ongoing need to confess reconciliation; and his life of hope with the ongoing need to confess justice. These comparisons are merely a way of reflecting on history and an attempt to show how these three characteristics of Beyers Naudé and the acts which constituted them are captured in and can lead us to a fuller understanding of the soft and distant cry of the Confession of Belhar.

Perhaps this is not the most appropriate way to deal with either the legacy and witness of Beyers Naudé or with the Belhar Confession, but my intention is to explore ways in which we can live together, while fully acknowledging the past and expressing our faith and hope in God. I believe that, in being mindful of the example and voice of Beyers Naudé, and in an ever-deepening dependence on God, we will be able to face the particular challenges that face us today and to work towards a different reality - as a legacy and witness to *our* children. As was the case with Naudé and as is the case in the Confession of Belhar, it is particularly the confession of our dependence on God that becomes all the more necessary.

#### 3.2.1 *What do we resist? We confess unity*

Resistance in the present presents itself as the challenge and empowerment towards change. Now the legacy of this history of resistance challenges us to change away from what was being resisted towards the ideal. The embodiment of the act of resistance in the present takes on the form of actively working towards a new ethos in, and structure of, society. This process requires the building of new attitudes in Church and society, and an important component of this is an ongoing resistance to erroneous biblical interpretations that demand from us to live in separation from others.

We then should resist any idea that still promotes the idea that it is better for the Church not to be One and we then should pursue actively ways of fostering One Church. In this way our plight becomes a plight for Church unification.

I specifically choose to combine Beyers Naudé's life of resistance with the concept of unity in the Confession of Belhar to reflect on his biblically based reasons for resistance and describing them in terms of a plight to serve in a Church where visible unity is possible. In the Confession the rejection of any form of disunity and the grounds of this rejection are clearly stated.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. the second article of the Belhar Confession:

We confess:

*We believe in one holy, universal Christian Church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family.*

In combining this particular form of resistance with the notion of unity *today* challenges us with the need to seek structural unity of the Church and a change in attitudes and prejudices towards fellow brothers and sisters in order to become one Body of Christ. This compels us to **confess the unity** of the Church and actively participate in the unification processes and to resist anything in the future that could destroy or endanger this costly unity.

### *3.2.2 With whom are we in solidarity? We confess reconciliation*

In responding to this question it is perhaps appropriate to confirm that it is through being reconciled in Christ that we are enabled to stand in solidarity with people. This embracing of the other requires of us to define our relationship towards the other and also challenges our identity.

The Afrikaner community has often been described as a pietistic community. The inherent danger of such an identity is that, in the extreme, it can focus too strongly on the salvation of the individual soul and can give very little, if any, attention to the broader context of relationships with others.<sup>18</sup>

As was seen Beyers Naudé's life, lived in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, confronts us with the question with whom we are in solidarity. To relate his

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We believe:

*That Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the Church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another;*

*That unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the Church of Jesus Christ, that through the working of God's Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought: one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain;*

*That this unity must become visible so that the world may believe; that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the Church and must be resisted;*

*That this unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways; in that we experience, practice, and pursue community with one another; that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another; that we share one faith have one calling are of one soul and one mind, have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptized with one baptism eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope; together come to know the height and the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ, together are built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity, together know and bear one another's burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ, that we need one another and up build one another, admonishing and comforting one another, that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness, pray together, together serve God in this world; and together fight against all which may threaten or hinder this unity;*

*That this unity can be established only in freedom and not under constraint, that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God;*

*That true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this Church.*

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Beyers Naudé, 2005d. "The Afrikaner and Race Relations." In Hansen, L.D. (ed.). 2005. *The Legacy of Beyers Naudé*. Stellenbosch: SUN PReSS, p. 57.



actions of solidarity with the third article of the Confession, that on reconciliation, is perhaps not the most evident possibility. However, in doing so I want to focus on the particular relationship that is established with 'the other' and the fact that being in an ongoing relationship with 'the other' is a simultaneous, continuing confession that all of us belong to Christ. Through Christ's reconciliatory act on our behalf, we are able to learn to confess our guilt, to ask, receive and grant forgiveness and grow into a deeper understanding of living together as brothers and sisters in him. Therefore the third article of the Confession of Belhar rejects any form of discrimination that hinders one from experiencing the reconciling act in Christ. The Confession shows that we stand in a relation of reconciliation with our fellow human beings; it challenges us to broaden our sense of identity in Christ; and it shows us the way to guard our relations with 'the other'.

By choosing to focus first on the concept of salvation perhaps can challenge the notion often found in pietistic communities, namely that it is only our souls that matter and that there is no need for visible relationships as a witness to our reconciliation between ourselves, because this is presupposed when we are united in Christ through the Holy Spirit. In the same vein, Luther in *Concerning Christian Liberty*, challenges a concept of salvation that sees it not only as being earned, but also as being only for the benefit of the soul, when he describes the freedom we receive in Christ and discipleship as a direct consequence of that freedom.<sup>19</sup>

Usually, when talking about salvation and the Christian life, the following two questions arise: firstly, how we obtain salvation, and secondly, whether this salvation has any effect or impact on our lives of discipleship? The first question usually points toward some tension between, on the one hand, the role of God and, on the other, human responsibility.

The role of God is sometimes defined as electing those people who will be saved and the One who, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, enables the salvation of all people. God must therefore be described as the just Judge, but at the same time as the merciful Father. Human responsibility in the process of salvation has been defined in a variety of ways in history – obedience to the law, doing good works in order to earn God's favour, justification through faith alone, etc. In *Concerning Christian Liberty*, Luther also reflected on this human participation, *in Christ*, in salvation which he described as being justified through faith alone, faith being fostered by the Holy Spirit and through the Word of God. Luther also wrote this to clarify the role of good works in salvation and to describe human beings as being freed for service. Regarding good works, he makes it clear that no work whatsoever or any attempt to follow the law could earn one any

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<sup>19</sup> Luther, M. 1910. "Ninety-five theses: address to the German Nobility *concerning Christian liberty*". In *The prince, by Niccolo Machiavelli, Utopia, by Sir Thomas More, Ninety-five theses: address to the German nobility concerning Christian Liberty, by Martin Luther*. The Harvard Classics, Vol. 36. New York: P.F. Collier & Son, pp.353 – 397.

righteousness. Faith, the sole prerequisite for salvation, is the clinging to the promise of the Father, never doubting that He is just, true and wise, and providing for us in the best way. In this “justification through faith alone” the soul and Christ are mysteriously united. And this union influences the way a Christian lives, because sin, death and hell belong to Christ, while grace, life and salvation belong to the soul. The inner person is therefore set free. When Luther subsequently turns to the outward person, he describes good works done by Christians as the fruits of the Spirit that follow from this freedom. The inner person is continuously being formed after the image of Christ, which the outer person should then reflect, a process described as sanctification. Human beings are still mortal and engage in everyday life and, although we are free and united with Christ, the sanctification process never ends. Luther again warns against attempts to lead a holy life as if such striving towards holiness could result in justification. The dedication to good works flows freely from the heart and this freedom derives from the touch of the Holy Spirit and our faithful response. Salvation solely flows from the gratuitous election of God and the acknowledgement thereof in faith. There is then a continuous renewal in the following of Christ in the Christian’s life of obedience and a continual grounding thereof in the saving act of Christ on the cross. The Christian’s life is constantly renewed through his/her mysterious unity with Christ, the renewing work of the Holy Spirit and the revelation of the Word of God. Salvation is linked to election and in the promise that God is our Father and in assurance through the Holy Spirit that we are indeed children of the Father. We become free to love and to serve one another (1 Peter 1).

Luther also makes the following two propositions concerning spiritual liberty and servitude: a Christian is lord of all, and the subject to none; a Christian is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to every one. The Christian inwardly becomes a new person. This means that the inward person becomes justified and free, a true Christian. Therefore nothing on the outside carries any weight to produce this liberty. Neither food, nor drink, hunger, nor thirst has anything to do with the liberty or the enslavement of the soul. There is only one thing needed for life and that is that the Son will make you free (John 10:25, Matt 4:4).

Finally, Luther writes that the soul can do without everything except without the Word of God. The Word is the Word of life, of truth, of light, of peace, of justification, of salvation, of joy, of liberty, of wisdom, of virtue, of grace, of glory and of every good thing. We therefore need the desire for the Word of God and to long for this life of joy and obedience. The fulfilment of the law of the Old Testament is seen as a precondition to be accepted by God. But the one trying to fulfil the Law will never be able to succeed and therefore the promise of the New Testament that all who believe in Christ the promise of grace, justification, peace and liberty is fulfilled. This salvation becomes part of the very being of the believer and his/her firm faith united him/her with this grace so that it becomes

part of the Christian life. The healing touch of Jesus is so powerful it can do miracles. This power touches us through his Word. Luther writes: “therefore the soul, through faith alone, without works, is from the Word of God justified and sanctified.”<sup>20</sup>

As noted above the pietistic community often only concentrates on the salvation aspect and focuses on the “status” of the soul without referring to the consequence of salvation of the individual for his/her broader society. It is therefore crucial to find the balance between the realization of our freedom in Christ and the practice of this freedom within the society that we live. The practice of this freedom will enable us to guard our relationships with others in the act of confessing reconciliation. This will remind us of the reconciling Spirit amongst us and that this Spirit enables us to love one another.

In confessing the **article on reconciliation** we acknowledge that the touch of the Spirit reforms us inwardly and outwardly and that this Spirit **enables us to form and sustain relationships anew**. In the words of the third article of the Belhar Confession we acknowledge that ...

“We believe that God has entrusted to his Church the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ, that the Church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the Church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the Church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells;

That God by his life giving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity; that God by his life giving word and Spirit will enable his people to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world;

That the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity;

That any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness, and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.

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<sup>20</sup> Luther, 1910: 361.

### 3.2.3 What do we hope for? - We confess justice

Beyers Naudé's life of hope shows that he hoped for and demanded a life of justice for all. He writes: "because this earth is God's earth, such rights must be accorded to all God's children everywhere on this globe."<sup>21</sup> His own life for many became a sign of hope that Christ can and does act through individuals.

South African theologian Russel Botman writes in "Hope as the coming Reign of God": "The world is accustomed to despair. It has known personal despair, familial despair, national and regional despair."<sup>22</sup> Botman further explains that "the unmasking of hope" has a long history and that for centuries we have relied on rational evolution of nature led by human beings, albeit through domination and subjugation of others. Therefore it is time to reawaken to Christian hope. Botman also refers to the theme of the Fifth Assembly of the world Council of Churches in Nigeria in 1975, "Jesus Christ Frees and Unites." The assembly had the task of developing the sub-theme "Confessing Christ Today". These Christians saw themselves as being called to "give account of the hope" that is in them. This developed into the notion of "Mission as Hope in Action" making clear the relationship between action and hope. The latter relationship is found in the Christian's calling to discipleship. Botman writes that:

"The mission of the Triune God calls for action in terms of the *imitatio Dei* (the following of God). It is God's mission, and every action of human beings can be only a following. Confessing hope is confession and not acts of human assertiveness. The hope of a disciple is never based on one's own agency but on one's following of the acting God who has acted then in Jesus Christ and now in and among us all in the world."<sup>23</sup>

It is therefore important to understand hope not only as an eschatological hope at the end of history, but also as God's involvement in history here and now.

The fourth article of the Confession of Belhar empowers us to keep our faith in a just God, in a God who stands with the poor and the oppressed. The confession therefore rejects all injustices and especially ideologies imposing injustices on biblical grounds; it prompts the Church to care for the poor and reminds us that **these acts are possible in and through the power of Christ.**<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Naudé, CFB. 2005a. "Christian Involvement in the Struggle for Human Rights and Justice," In Hansen, L.D. (ed.). 2005. *The Legacy of Beyers Naudé*. Stellenbosch: SUN PReSS, p. 115.

<sup>22</sup> Botman, 2001. "Hope as the coming reign of God" In Brueggemann W. 2001. *Hope for the World: Mission in a Global Context*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, p.70.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> We confess:

*We believe that God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among men; that in a world full of injustice and enmity he is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, and*

#### 4. Conclusion

I have argued that this interpretation of the Confession of Belhar in the light of life and witness Beyers Naudé highlights the need for visible unity of the Church, for an ongoing broadening of our identity in Christ and a never-ceasing involvement with the poor and the oppressed as individuals made in the image of God, as well involvement in fighting structural injustices in our society. I have also expressed my belief that, as a new generation, we are in need of a continuous act of confession. Such an act reminds us again and again that injustices should not repeat themselves and also orientates us towards a deeper relationship with God that can bring healing and direction to our current lives of faith in our particular context. The Confession of Belhar points to the Triune God who acts justly and loves tenderly and our act of confessing will strengthen this witness. The new challenges that face us today and in future will remain ambiguous and unclear and we again will have to struggle with different interpretations of Scripture that propose different responses to it. We will have to struggle with our fear of the other and with the unmasking of injustices. In the process the Confession of Belhar can also voice *our* cry and *our* faith in the Triune God.

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*the wronged and that he calls his Church to follow him in this; that he brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry; that he frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind, that he supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows, and blocks the path of the ungodly, that for him pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their suffering, that he wishes to teach his people to do what is good and to seek the right:*

*That the Church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the Church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;*

*That the church as the possession of God must stand where he stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the Church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.*

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## FROM THE ARCHIVES DOES THE CHURCH STILL HAVE A FUTURE?<sup>1</sup>

Beyers Naudé

Scripture reading: Mat. 16:13-23

Mat. 16:18: "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death will not prevail against it."<sup>2</sup>

"Does the Church still have a future?" If one looks at all the new congregations being founded in our country, the huge church buildings being erected, the growth in the numbers of members, then we could say this question is completely unnecessary. And if we read of the wonderful signs of new life and interest [in the Church] in some countries abroad, we almost want to say: All is well with the Church!

But when we take note of what is happening in communist countries like Russia and China, when we read of the many restrictions placed on Christian churches in India, when we take note of all that is happening in Africa where the flowering of nationalism is leading to the overthrow of white authority and Christianity, then we can rightfully ask: Does the Church still have a future?

But the question becomes a crucial question, a vital issue, when we consider the life and witness of the Church itself, the signs of weakening and disruption, not outside the Church, but within it! Signs of its unity crumbling, of a Church that has let the dividing boundary between it and the world fade away, of a Church that has lowered and diluted its spiritual and moral standards, of a Church where there is a serious lack of the necessary Christian love, the faith and the zeal to witness. When we see these things, we have to ask with greater gravity: Does the Church still have a future?

In order to answer this question we must first ask: What does Scripture teach us with regard to the Church? Our passage supplies us with an inspiring answer.

I. Christ founds and builds his Church:

Christ clearly says to Peter: "I will build my church." Jesus Christ, that is, the Founder of the Church: *He* calls his Church into being, no other person but he alone may do this. The meaning of the word in Greek ("Church", i.e. "that which belongs to the Lord") makes it clear that the Church to which we belong can never

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<sup>1</sup> Translation of a sermon delivered at the DRC Congregation Aasvoëlkop, Johannesburg on 11 September 1960.

<sup>2</sup> RSV – eds.

be *our* church. It is not a club or society, which we can found and dissolve as we like. It is the Body of Christ. *He* determines who may become its members, not us! And *He* builds it. He builds His Church by calling from the human race all who have accepted Him as their Lord and Saviour, and we may therefore not impose lesser conditions for membership that are contrary to His Word. Therefore too we may not remain silent and sit still when sinful strife and division develop in the Church through which separate, opposing churches come into being that disrupt the unity of the Body of Christ! The church that builds in this way builds on sand! Such a church gambles with its future! Christ is not interested to know if there is a DR Church or an Anglican Church. He asks and wants to know: Is this the Church that *I* have founded and that *I* built? Is this “Εκκλησία μου”?<sup>3</sup>

## II. Christ preserves and safeguards His Church

How powerful and safe His Word sounds: “and the powers of death will not prevail against it”! Christ knew exactly what was waiting for His Church on earth: times of decline, disruption, threat and persecution when the very existence of the whole Church would be at stake! Like the Church of the Old Covenant was threatened in the days of Elijah, Daniel and Nehemiah, so it was threatened after the death of Christ: by Nero’s persecution, through the false patronage of Constantine the Great, through the corruption of doctrine by Rome in the time of the Reformation...and always Christ would stretch out his hand over his Church to guard and protect it. However, this does not mean that Christ protected the Church through sinful means; on the contrary, He uses pagan nations, wicked ideologies, worldly powers, revolution and violence to punish and chastise His Church, to force it to a standstill and to have a change of heart, to force it to face the question: Are we still the Church of Christ? Church of the Scriptures? Or have we been flagging, straying? Are we becoming diluted and worldly? O let us, also in South Africa and in our DR Church, move away from the idea that Christ will protect us from oppression or collapse because we think that we are a strong or fine church! Christ preserves *His* Church, but not necessarily *my* church!

## III. Christ enlarges and renews His Church

Throughout prosperity and adversity, earthly kingdoms that come and go, referenda for or against monarchies or republics, Christ is busy increasing the power and life of His Church. This is the miracle of Christ’s work and of His Kingdom: He carries on despite everything. In the process sometimes he uses peace, sometimes war, sometimes the faithful, sometimes non-believers.

And when His Church does not comprehend its calling, fails in its task, denies its essence, then Christ calls forth powers and movements that, precisely through its

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<sup>3</sup> “My Church?”



opposition, open the eyes of the Church to its own slackness, its blindness, its omission.

It is exactly here where so many Christians misunderstand the issue: they believe the Church has a future, they believe Christ's cause will be victorious, but that is where it stays. They do not understand that true faith always leads to action, conversion always leads to renewal, and they do not understand that we, as Christians, must remember: only the Church that pursues the unity of the Church of Christ has a future; only the Church that remains committed to its missionary task has a future; only the Church where love flourishes, charity increases and faith lives, has a future; only the Church that truthfully searches for its convictions in God's Word and proclaims them fearlessly to its members, only such a Church has a future! Only the Church that calls on its members to live lives of greater purity, sanctity and obedience in Christ Jesus has a future! ... Yes, we should learn that it is not Khrushchev, Nkhromah, Mao Tse-Tung or Eisenhower or Kennedy that determines the future of the Church. It is Christ and He alone! But this he wants to do by asking every believer, every member of the Church personally: What is my Church worth to *you*? And, above all, we have to learn: a Church's future is determined by neither Synods nor Classes, but solely by the witness of its every congregation.

# WOMEN IN THE THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF BEYERS NAUDÉ<sup>1</sup>

Dr Mary-Anne Plaatjies-Van Huffel<sup>2</sup>

## 1. Introduction

The aim of this article is not to write a comprehensive thesis on every possible sub-theme relating to women in the theological anthropology of Dr Beyers Naudé. What follows is an exposition, done against a post-structuralist background, of the question of women in the theological anthropology of Beyers Naudé. This will be done with specific reference to three important sources of his life and thought: his autobiography, *My land van Hoop – Die lewe van Beyers Naudé*; his interview in 1985 for IKON Television, a Dutch ecumenical broadcasting company, with German theologian Dorothee Sölle; and his famous farewell sermon to his DRC congregation of Aasvoëlkop, Johannesburg on Acts 5:29, “Obedience to God.” I will use the insights of Michel Foucault and post-structuralist feminists, amongst others Pamela Milne and Elizabeth Castelli, to deconstruct the theological basis of Beyers Naudé’s assumptions with regard to women. I hope thereby to illustrate, with reference to Beyers Naudé, how one might come to a deeper understanding of a theologian’s theological anthropology and his/her theological presuppositions concerning women and how this continues to present a challenge to churches in future.

## 2. A post-structuralist deconstruction of Beyers Naudé’s theological anthropology

In twentieth-century literary theory structuralism has led exegetes to search for what lies beneath the surface of the text, while it is a post-structuralist insight that gender subjects are constructed in and through discourse.<sup>3</sup> This post-structuralist

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<sup>1</sup> Paper presented at the mini-conference “Oom Bey for the Future” hosted by the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Stellenbosch on 24 August 2005.

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<sup>3</sup> Structuralism is an approach applied in a variety of academic disciplines (psychology, anthropology, philosophy, political theory, etc.) and explores the inter-relationships between fundamental elements of some kind, upon which higher mental, linguistic, social, cultural etc. “structures” are built and through which meaning is then produced within a particular person, system or culture. Structuralism is generally held to derive from the early-twentieth-century work of Ferdinand de Saussure, the founder of structural linguistics. De Saussure understood language to be a rule-governed social system of signs whereby effective communication depends on the resources available to the speaker from within the codes of language itself. Structuralism tends to

approach dethrones the writer (Ruemann: 1992: 65) as it no longer asks the question posed in traditional critiques, namely, "What is the intention of the writer?" According to post-structuralists the text itself determines its interpretation. Neither the writer nor the reader behind the text and his/her intentions are any longer the determining factors in the understanding of a text. There exists rather a continuous and inter-subjective process which determines the meaning of the text. Michel Foucault was an important proponent of post-structuralism.<sup>4</sup> For Foucault the autonomy of the text therefore stands at the centre.<sup>5</sup> He puts the discourse, the discursive events and/or the anonymous (wo) man at the centre of the discursive practices. In other words, the discourse functions independently from the writer, poet or theologian who wrote the text. This independent text always paves the way for the interpreted meaning, "die altijd de geïnterpreteerde en de interpreterende betekenis te boven gaat" (Bakker 1973: 139). Subsequently, texts should be read in view of what stands there and what does not stand there. For Foucault this latter way of reading a text provides it with a coherent structure (1972: 50). This method of reading – what stands there and what does not – can also be applied to the theological statements by Beyers Naudé.

Furthermore, as the text contains meaning that is independent from the intention of the writer, it reflects the subconscious personal, psychological, socio-cultural presuppositions within which the author lives and writes.<sup>6</sup> This too will be applicable to texts by Beyers Naudé.

We should, in this quest to understand the role of women in the theological anthropology of Beyers Naudé, also distinguish between two levels of networks of meaning, namely the surface structure and the depth structure of a text. Surface

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be less preoccupied with the more traditional considerations of "subjectivity" and "history" in its treatment of meaningful discourse (cf. D. Allison, 1996:770-771). Exponents of post-structuralism, for example Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida, were influenced by structural linguistics but eventually distanced themselves from it, reacting to its formalism and its notion of an epistemological subject - a subject which is implied and/or explicitly defended or critically viewed (Poster 1989: 4). According to Berman (1988: 172), it is best to think of post-structuralism as a set of related approaches to a similar problem - the relation of self, and language - which together, when set beside (or inside) structuralism, disclose its underlying inconsistencies and force it to its theoretical limits.

<sup>4</sup> Foucault, born in France in 1926, is described by Dreyfus (1972: xiv) as "a non-historical historian, an anti-humanist humanist scientist, a counter-structural structuralist." Foucault wrote, apart from his classical work *Madness and Civilization* (1961), several other works, including *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), *The Order of Things* (1966), *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison* (1977), *History of Sexuality* Vol. 1 (1976), Vols. 2 and 3 (1984). Foucault's studies on madness, medicine, punishment and sexuality had in common a preoccupation with power relations involved in the control of what constitutes reason, knowledge, and truth (Plaatjies 2005: 8).

<sup>5</sup> According to Bakker (1973: 156), Foucault decentralises the particular notion that (wo)man and/or writer stands at the centre in discursive events.

<sup>6</sup> This is the reason why Weedon (1997:173) says that "[p]ost-structuralist theory has challenged both the nature and privileged status of the reasoning subject in the West."

structure deals with the use of language - in the present case that of Beyers Naudé in the theological contributions under scrutiny - whilst depth structure refers to the language control, the underlying semantic content of the story related. The dominant discourse on which Beyers Naudé's theological contributions are based cannot be changed by re-reading or re-interpreting the surface information of text. Furthermore, as in the theological contributions of Beyers Naudé, we find a conscious self and an introspective self, which are constantly aware of the compulsion to make choices and to act.

Epistemologically, the post-structuralist begins with the presupposition that all meaning and knowledge are constituted discursively by language. Foucault, for instance, demonstrates that language is sovereign and that words have the power to present thought (Berman 1988: 178). According to him, the self and/or meaning is constituted by language (1988: 5).<sup>7</sup> Foucault also speaks of language as always localised in a discourse: "Discourse refers to an interrelated system of statements which cohere around common meaning and values ... [that] are a product of social factors, of powers and practices, rather than an individual's set of ideas" (Gavey 1989: 464). Discourse refers to a broad concept which points, in a way, to a way of constituting meaning specific to a particular group, culture and/or historical period and which changes constantly (Gavey 1989: 464). Discourses, like the language they employ, support the power relations and constitute the subjectivity of people at a specific place and time (Gavey 1989: 463). Along these lines, Harrison stresses that language is the ineluctable bearer and transmitter of all cultural and social patterns and all social relations, and transmits not only a sense of the *polis* or political society we are born into, but also conveys our sense of personal-relational power, or lack of it (1985: 24). It will therefore be alleged, for example, that Beyers Naudé's preference to use gender-sensitive language allows him to transmit cultural and social patterns and social relations as well as a sense of the patriarchal, hierarchical society he was born into.

As comparatively few theological works by Naudé were published, I chose to take special note of the three theological contributions by him - the theological content in his abovementioned autobiography, his theological contributions in the interview with Dorothee Sölle, and his 1963 sermon, "Obedience to God." In the light of the methodological considerations above, even though these three sources evidently bear very little reference to women - and when they do the theological rationale behind statements on women, here or elsewhere, which Naudé did make is often not clearly explained by him - they do, however, rationally stand

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<sup>7</sup> Similarly anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss also sees language as a carrier of values and ideas (Berman, 1988:178) and, according to Elizabeth Castelli, language is never a neutral medium and has a constitutive character even when used to communicate or to reflect on the world (Castelli, 1992: 205).

connected with, and provide the opportunity to deduce, his theological-anthropological presuppositions regarding women.

2. Women in the Beyers Naudé's autobiography and interview with Dorothee Sölle

Beyers Naudé was born into and grew up in a typical Afrikaner household. According to him, the life pattern, lifestyle and life views of the Afrikaner are based on the Reformed tradition (Naudé, 1995: 5). The roles and functions of men and women in his autobiography are gendered-based, thus women are mainly involved in a functional way. They are portrayed in traditional roles as mothers, pastor's wives and sisters; helping, serving and/or attending to the needs of males. His sisters, for example, tend to the clothes of their brothers, while the males were slaughtering goats (1995: 13). Their male counterparts are portrayed in typical patriarchal settings. It can therefore be said that Beyers Naudé constitutes women here as dependent objects in a patriarchal system, portraying them as obedient/dependent and voiceless bodies. In his autobiography women and/or their contributions can even be said to be largely absent. At best, reference is made to the mother, Adriana Johanna Zondagh van Huyssteen, and sisters, Ligstraal, Hymne, Adelen, Vryheidster, Reinet, Lierieka, and to his wife, Ilse. Amongst all of these, only Ilse has a voice in the autobiography. The latter is found in a citation that has to do with Ilse as pastor's wife and the reasons why she did not become a member of the DRCA.

“Bey, jy moet my nie kwalik neem nie, maar ek kan nie lidmaat van die NGKA se gemeente in Alexandra word nie. Ek het hoegenaamd geen probleem om lidmaat te word van 'n swart kerk omdat ek reeds in Genadendal in die Morawiese kerk lidmaat van 'n kleurlingkerk was, my probleem is prakties, jy is ingeperk en mag nie Alexandra woongebied ingaan nie. Ek sien nie kans om alleen na Alexandra te gaan nie. Ek het die behoefte om aktief betrokke te wees met vroue in 'n gemeente waarin ek deelneem aan vrouebyeenkomste, bybelstudie, bidure en waar nodig die Sondagskool” (1995: 118)<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> “Bey, you must not take exception to my not becoming a member of the DRCA's congregation in Alexandra. I have no qualms whatsoever with becoming a member of a black church as I have already been a member of a Coloured church in Genadendal in the Moravian Church; my problem is a practical one; you have been restricted and may not enter Alexandra township. I do not see my way clear to going to Alexandra on my own. I need to be actively involved with the women in a congregation where I can take part in women's groups, Bible study, prayer meetings and if need be, Sunday school.” (translation – ed.)

Naudé accepted her reasons wholeheartedly:

“ Ek verstaan dit alte goed, Ilse, ek neem jou nie die minste kwalik nie. Dit is die prys wat ons twee moet betaal vir die sonde wat apartheid ook binne die kerk teweegbring.” (ibid)<sup>9</sup>

Predominantly male theologians in the Afrikaans Reformed tradition, as here in the case of Beyers Naudé, gave women speech only by articulating on their behalf. Furthermore, as can be seen from the above citation, Beyers Naudé did not question his wife's theological presuppositions in her choice of not becoming a member of the DRCA. In the light of his autobiography, he thus separates the dominant discourse on the role and function of men and women in the church and society in a bipolar way. He does not empower women to act as agents of social transformation and, as far as his autobiography is concerned, Beyers Naudé puts women in the private sphere, in family contexts, and constitutes women in traditional stereotypical roles. It therefore seems as if Naudé's emphasis, in the interview with Sölle, on the fact that he had been strongly influenced by his own socio-economic-political circumstances is also reflected in his traditional patriarchal portrayal of women in his autobiography.<sup>10</sup>

Naudé also mentions in his autobiography that he arrived at Stellenbosch on 15 January 1932. Here he was deeply influenced by the discursive practices during 1928-1932, especially the Du Plessis<sup>11</sup> church case. As young student, Beyers Naudé paid regular visits to Professor Du Plessis (1995: 24). The Du Plessis church case made a huge contribution to public debate on theological issues, but would eventually also lead to the silencing of this debate. The Du Plessis case can also be seen as a watershed in the history of the DRC. An uncritical and even mechanical exposition of Scripture and understanding of the Bible became standard practice in the DRC. This would be even more evident in later years with regards to the theological discourse on the issue of race as well as the ordination of women. The Du Plessis church case also had a great influence on Beyers Naudé's moral-ethical

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<sup>9</sup> “I understand all too well, Ilse, and I do not take exception. This is the price the two of us have to pay for the sin that apartheid also brings about in the church.” (translation – ed.)

<sup>10</sup> *Hope for Faith*, p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> Du Plessis was a professor at the Theological Seminary in Stellenbosch in the 1920s and 30s. He was accused by the curators of the Seminary that his views were contradictory to the doctrines of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) (Cf. *Die Kerksaak*, 1932: 1). Du Plessis established a link between the contributions of Higher Critique with the theological issues he struggled with, amongst others, the doctrine of Kenosis, authority of the Scriptures, doctrine of Inspiration, etc. At a special session of the Synod of the DRC in 1930 Du Plessis was found guilty of, amongst other things, holding unacceptable views on the doctrine of Inspiration, the Higher Critique, the doctrine of Kenosis and the Articles of faith. Because of his ‘dissenting theological views’, Du Plessis was dismissed from his post as professor with full salary, housing subsidy and pension benefits. In a civil appeal by Du Plessis the High Court annulled the decision to which the Synod came on doctrinal grounds (Malan, 1932: 223). The DRC Synod 1932 accepted the verdict, but at the same time decided to terminate Du Plessis's services as professor at the Seminary (Malan, 1932: 241-244).

choices, theological emphases, human relations, cultural attitudes and political choices, his theological-anthropological presuppositions in theology, etc., as Naudé had made a choice for a confessional-reformed standpoint, whereby the acceptance of the authority of the Scriptures, as point of departure, was given precedence.

Regarding his interview with Sölle for IKON Television on 20 June 1985, it is, surprisingly, not mentioned in his autobiography. It was the first time that Dorothee Sölle and Naudé, then the general secretary of the South African Council of Churches, met. Throughout the interview, Naudé does not actively engage with Dorothee Sölle on the issue of women. In contrast, Sölle clearly stated her notions on the issue:

“I think the growth of the true church today comes not from within but from the outside, from the peace groups, *from the women’s groups*, from those groups who in certain fields of post-Christian culture live and think and understand more and more the meaning of the gospel, namely than those white male, middle-class theologians. ... *I do put my hope more on women, on women’s groups inside the first world*” (*Hope for Faith*: 20 – my emphasis)

### 3. Beyers Naudé’s hermeneutics: “Obedience to God”

At the end of Naudé’s autobiography he included, amongst other things, the text of the sermon he delivered on 22 September 1963 at his Aasvoëlkop DRC congregation in Johannesburg on Acts 5: 29 (1995: 157-161). In this sermon he announced his decision on his future directorship of the Christian Institute of Southern Africa. What is especially interesting for our exposition here is the apparent discrepancy between what Naudé says in the sermon and the findings we came to with regard to the rest of his autobiography and the interview with Sölle. Naudé namely referred in his sermon to men and women as co-bearers of the proclamation of the Word of God (1995: 160).<sup>12</sup> Therefore, in this sermon he portrays men and women in partnership doing theology in the first Christian community and thus presupposes that women are equal to men. Indeed, Naudé is of the opinion that the rise of Christian religion changed the situation for women positively. He acknowledges the individuality of women, and did not limit their place and influence to the family. In opposition to his following of traditional emphases on the dependent role of women shown in section 2, Beyers Naudé here

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<sup>12</sup> “Broers en susters...[w]at beteken ‘by God staan’ anders dat ons die koningskap van Jesus Christus oor alle volke, dus ook oor ons volk, sal uitroep en verkondig, ook wat ons ekumeniese en rasserverhoudings betref?” (my emphasis where? ) (“Brothers and sisters...[w]hat does it mean to ‘stand by God’ other than calling out and proclaiming the kingship of Jesus Christ over all peoples, and, therefore also over our people, and this also applies to our ecumenical and race relations?”) (trans. - ed.)

emphasizes in this sermon an egalitarian community, as far as gender is concerned.

#### 4. Beyers Naudé's theological contributions on women

Despite the above sermon, it seems as if Beyers Naudé for the most part maintained a dualistic theological anthropology in the two contributions under consideration. The binary oppositions<sup>13</sup> that fundamentally belong to such a theological anthropology include: male/female, father/mother, church-/family life, church/society. Naudé acknowledges woman's variety of roles as mother, woman and professional worker and even as co-bearer of the Word of God. However, in his autobiography and in the interview, his use of polarities, for example man/woman, white/black, father/mother and public life/private life, constitutes the private, non-public role and function of women, and enforce the patriarchal, dualistic, hierarchical theological notions within the Afrikaans Reformed Churches. Given the ten-year interval between the two texts, one also expects that over time a paradigm shift concerning women should have taken place in Beyers Naudé's theological anthropology. However, no such major paradigm shifts can be detected and Naudé apparently has not done much to transform the patriarchal anthropology in the latest of the three theological contributions - and by patriarchy I mean not only the subordination of females to males, but also the whole structure of a father-ruled society.

In his defence it must, however, be remembered that the quest for women in the theological anthropology of Beyers Naudé is impeded by the fact that he did not practice theology systematically, but functioned rather strongly as a role player in the "social gospel" in the South African context and his biggest contribution lies rather on a practical-theological level. He therefore did not leave us a series of concepts, which would enable a more systematic evaluation of women in his theology. What can be said, at least according to the three sources of this thought under consideration here, is that he maintained a particular view on the role of the Church in the struggle for social justice, with the result that issue of women in the theological anthropology was never broached here and he does not try to deconstruct women in the theological anthropology of his own theological tradition. One might therefore say that these three theological contributions subconsciously reflect Naudé's personal, psychological, socio-cultural presuppositions in which he lived and wrote. And, even if for him the real Church

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<sup>13</sup> Binary oppositions are created by language and refer to depth structures, that is, the dominant discourse based on socio-economic realities, underlying the text. Binary oppositions are but one of many useful ways to understand the way people think, according to Spivey (1974: 140). According to Milne (1989: 21-23), binary oppositions point to the dominant discourse on which text is based and cannot be changed by the re-reading or re-interpretation of the surface information of text. Examples of binary oppositions are, amongst others: up/down, right/left, dark/light, separation/unity, struggle/reconciliation, subject/object, sender/receiver, helper/opponent, etc.



is where the people of God are, where life is being discovered again together with the true meaning of love, of human community, and of mutual concern for one another, not only between Christians but between *all people* (*Hope for Faith*: 21), no clear theological contributions by Naudé himself with regard to the plight of women have been documented. He, for instance, did not publicly reflect on decisions of the Afrikaans Reformed Churches concerning women's ordination and gendered-based women organizations in the Dutch Reformed family of churches.

Furthermore, Naudé's theological critique of the DRC's theological anthropology during the 1970s took place mainly within a liberation theology framework and not a feminist framework. As can be seen in the case of the three texts here, on the one hand, he rejected apartheid ideology but, on the other hand, the total theological anthropology responsible for the dominant discourses concerning class, race and sex are not deconstructed by him. The dominant discourse during the 1970s in South Africa concerned black theology and the Reformed identity. Women's issues were for the most part ignored during the struggle for social justice. According to Denise Ackermann, "[t]he priority afforded to combat institutionalized racial discrimination during the struggle for liberation, though it is understandable, has unfortunately led to the sidelining of women's issues" (1995: 122). From what has been said here Beyers Naudé apparently also regarded the racial issue as a separate entity, whilst I for one believe that class, racial and sexual discrimination has to do with power relations. Although he made a remarkable contribution in the reflection on the relation between liberation theology and the Reformed identity, it seems as if he did not place women's issues within the framework of a black Reformed identity or brought about a paradigm shift regarding it. The worldwide discourse outside of South Africa during the 1970s on the women's issues, language and feminism did not form part of Naudé's theological contributions under discussion. More research needs to be done to see if this can be said of his theological contributions in general, as it seems like wasted opportunities that the synods, lecture halls, ecumenical forums (for example, World Council of Reformed Churches (WCC), South African Council of Churches (SACC), World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), Alliance of Black Reformed Christians in South Africa (ABRESCA) and Confession Circle (CC)), which served as institutional platforms for his Beyers Naudé's discourse, were not utilised by him. This is even more the case as he was an ecumenical leader in national and international ecumenical organizations with widespread influence and with many opportunities to address the quest of women in theological anthropology.

## 5. Concluding remarks

With an eye on the future, the fact that even someone with the reputation for a sense of justice and equality like Beyers Naudé in these three important and

widely read theological contributions apparently did not actively challenge or change the dominant discourses that imprisoned women or shifted theological presuppositions, patriarchal world images, traditions and/or hermeneutics regarding women, underlines the need for churches to consider deconstructing women in theological anthropology. In the future the frame of reference for women's issues will probably be post-structuralist. A post-structuralist approach to theological anthropology demands a revision of our basic approach to doing theology. It demands a recasting of the basic evidence on which we reflect theologically and it challenges the presuppositions and methodology with which we previously approached the theological contributions of even revered male theologians such as Beyers Naudé. We require new maps, new paradigms, new ways of thinking about and doing theology. We should critique patriarchal, androcentric and sexist images in our doing of theology and reconstruct a new vision of what it means to be a redeemed human being. A paradigm shift in our reading processes, hermeneutics and biblical exegesis should occur. It is with this prospect in mind that I conclude by listing the following guidelines that can assist churches and theologians in such a deconstruction of women in theological anthropology.

- **Historiography:** Deconstruct sexist, patriarchal metaphors and images in historical analysis.
- **Anthropology:** Shift from a dualistic, patriarchal anthropology to a relational, transformative anthropology, where the complete humanity of all people, regardless of race, sex and class is intercepted. In the transformative anthropological model the emphasis falls on the unity between the two sexes.
- **Dualism:** Shift away from dualistic, hierarchical, anthropocentric, androcentric, patriarchal and universal notions to a holistic integration of mind and body. Emphasize the communal interdependency of the sexes, the equality of all people regardless of race, colour, origin or culture. Paternalistic, patriarchal anthropology must be replaced and new holistic images must be found which emphasize the complete humanity of all people regardless of race, class or sex.
- **Language:** Emphasize that the dominant discourses, the socio-economic realities on which the texts are based cannot be changed by re-reading or re-interpreting the surface information of the text. Transform sexist language into the language of partnership.
- **Power-based relationships:** Deconstruct the material base of power, for example social, economic, cultural, and replace it with partnership relations.

Having said all of this, I would like to end with the following remark: the above exposition restricts itself to three sources of Oom Bey's thought. What has been said here does not necessarily apply to all that was said and written by him. One

must furthermore not forget the importance of the influence that Beyers Naudé exerted on Christians and non-Christians alike and thus, eventually, on women. His own theological notions on, and his identification with, the political aspirations of the black people of South Africa would later have a deep-rooted influence on both male and female in the country.

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Beyers Naudé

It is with a measure of embarrassment that I note the prominence given to the personal pronoun in the title of my address; this gives the impression of importance of a personal opinion which is not intended as such. The reason for my formulation of the title in this way is mainly because there seems to me at present to be a serious confusion in the minds of white students of English-speaking universities about the South Africa they want. Perhaps this is due to the apathy of the student body following the series of actions taken against NUSAS; perhaps it is due to the fact of the general swing to the right within the white community in South Africa – a swing which is being clearly reflected on the campuses of English-speaking universities; perhaps it is due to the loss of hope amongst many of you that students could make any meaningful contribution to change.

Whatever the causes might be, the fact is that there is no general consensus of opinion amongst white English-speaking students about the nature and pattern of the South Africa of tomorrow which they would wish to share in and assist in building. Is it to be a fragmented South Africa with the white Republic of South Africa comprising 87% of the geographical area of present South Africa containing 4½ million whites with a predominance of 11½ million blacks (Africans, coloureds and Indians) surrounding 8 small, economically largely unviable, black states? Is it to be a federal state of some kind subdivided into regional areas (as far as possible) based on historical, racial, ethnic and cultural differences? Is it to be a politically integrated unified state with a form of qualified franchise given to blacks (with all whites above 18 years enjoying the privilege of voting) and a guarantee for the rights of minorities? Or do you envisage for South Africa a non-racial society based on communalism with franchise rights for all and a promise of protection for minorities (a policy advocated by a body like the BPC)?

Because I have no idea which of these four possibilities the student community of the University of Cape Town might opt for, I find it difficult to talk in general of the South Africa *we* want. I am therefore forced to state first of all my personal views on this matter and it seems to me to be best by starting to state very clearly which kind of South Africa I do not want - in the belief that you will subscribe to these views – before I proceed to state my views on the kind of South Africa which I wish for in the hope that you will be in agreement with this vision and, if not,

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<sup>1</sup> Address delivered at the University of Cape Town at the invitation of its Students Representative Council on Thursday, 3 June 1976. Originally published in *Pro Veritate*, June 1976, pp. 3-4.

that at least this might stimulate you as a student community to clarify your views on this decision about the future of our country and about your own role which you wish to play.

1. The South Africa I do not want

- 1.1. I do not want a South Africa under an authoritarian or dictatorial rule of any kind – regardless of whether this comes from the left or from the right. Therefore I reject in the strongest possible terms any communist rule for our country as totally unacceptable; I equally reject any other form of political absolutism which denies the citizens of our country their freedom of political choice and which of necessity must lead to the denial of human rights and the oppressive rule of a small minority over the large majority.
- 1.2. I do not want a South Africa, the internal security of which has been endangered to such a degree by racial policies and forms of legislation abhorrent to the vast majority of its inhabitants that it requires ever-increasing frightening powers of security by such acts as the Terrorism Act, the PISCOM Act and such bills as the Promotion of Internal Security Bill. Every state has the right and the duty to ensure true security for all its citizens – but such security could only be lasting and therefore acceptable if it is based on justice for all. Any form of security which claims to protect the rights and safety of the majority but which in fact imposes the political and military control of a minority (in our situation the the white minority) over a large majority (in our situation the black majority), could never safeguard true justice and peace and therefore it eventually threatens true law and order. The maintenance of law and order which violates the rights of the majority constitutes a serious threat to justice and peace and inevitably leads to injustice and disorder.
- 1.3. I do not want a South Africa which enforces on the basis of a political ideology a political, social and economic system where the greatest form of separation is seen to be the only salvation of the whites. It is this political ideology which has brought into being the concept of Bantustans – later termed homelands; more than a hundred discriminatory Acts based solely or mainly on race or colour on our statute books; it is this ideology which now forces 1½ million people of the Transkei to face the loss of a precious birthright universally recognised by all civilised nations of the world and which, if once imposed by our government, could eventually leave 16 million blacks living in South Africa as stateless citizens by the year 2000; it is this ideology which estranges a coloured community of 2½ million people from the whites by refusing them the political rights which by virtue of civilization, culture and history they are fully entitled to have. Through all such actions we as whites are increasing the already existing deep frustration, bitterness and growing polarization between black and white which in turn could so easily develop into a situation of conflict and violence – as an eminent black leader like Dean Tutu has so

clearly and movingly spelt out in his recent open letter to the Prime Minister. Such a South Africa I do not want – and I believe I am right if I say that you equally reject such a concept.

- 1.4. I do not want a South Africa where an ever-increasing system of control over the freedom of the press, over censorship of publications, over the right of every individual to express through responsible protest his or her legitimate opinion of concern and disagreement is being imposed through acts, publication boards and such like bodies in such a way that any independent, critical thought is thereby threatened, suppressed or made suspect. The mind of man is constantly reaching out towards new horizons in its search for truth: all authoritarian regimes (regardless of whether they be communist, fascist or so-called Christian-Nationalist) seek to control the minds of the people they rule through brutal forms of indoctrination by controlling or enforceably prescribing through their communication media what should and what should not be spoken, preached, printed, published, filmed, photographed, televised, publicly screened. Like Russia we are already far advanced on this road of ideological indoctrination, psychological brain-washing and mental control which stand in direct opposition to the need for academic freedom which any university requires if it wishes to fulfil its legitimate function. And in the long run it creates the serious danger of a whole society or groups within such a society (like the whites in Rhodesia at present) becoming blind to truth and reality to such a degree that such a society or community is unable to recognise and face what is so patently obvious to everyone outside that enclosed and embattled circle. Such a South Africa – which is slowly but inexorably being forced upon us – I do not want – and I believe I'm speaking on behalf of you as a student community if I say that you equally do not want it!
- 1.5. I do not want a South Africa where the ownership of land, the economic wealth, the social privileges and educational opportunities are owned, enjoyed, controlled or decided upon by an elite minority of race or class in favour of the few to the detriment of the majority. All of us are aware – or should be – of, amongst others, the following situations in our midst: Whereas any white person has the right by law of ownership of land in any part of white declared South Africa (87% of its present territory), no African has such a right; whereas any white has the right to choose or offer his labour in any part of the country, no African has such a right; whereas a white has the freedom by law to enjoy his social privileges in any part of the country, no African has such a right; whereas the economic advance and income of the country is equally ensured by white technical expertise, good organisational and administrative planning, skilled labour as well as the indispensable contribution of black labour (skilled and unskilled), the average income per white is approximately 9 times more than the income per African. This discrepancy in income is but one example of many forms of economic injustice

which the white community has allowed to develop and to continue. This seems to be one of the main reasons why increasingly blacks believe that the capitalist system of free enterprise has failed to solve any of the deeply-felt economic injustices of which the black community as a whole have become the victims. This in turn has stimulated the interest of many black intellectuals (especially amongst the young) in searching for and favourably considering some form of African socialism or communalism as the answer to the failure of capitalism to ensure economic justice for the majority of the people of the land. I do not want a South Africa where, despite pious promises and assurances that discrimination will be removed and injustices of this kind will disappear, very little is happening to prove these assurances. And I believe I have the right to state on your behalf that you – even if only for reasons of self-interest – equally refuse to want to commit yourselves to such a country!

## 2. The South Africa I do want

Let us now turn to the positive side of the picture in trying to answer the question: What then is the South Africa we in fact do want? Again I find myself in the difficult position of not knowing how you envisage the future of the country in which you live and therefore I again give my answer in a personal form, as well as I am able to do so, in the hope of obtaining either agreement and support or at least a serious consideration of the thoughts which I present:

- 2.1. The South Africa I do want is one where the permanency of the millions of Africans residing and working outside the homelands, plus *all* the coloureds and Indians as an integral part of the Republic of South Africa, should be recognised. Once this principle is accepted, the ideological basis on which our present racial policy rests will have been rejected and substituted by a more human, pragmatic political approach. This recognition should be given, even if all the homelands (voluntary or otherwise) accept independence of some kind, either in the near or the distant future.
- 2.2. The South Africa I do want is one where the principle that harmonious human relationships, peace and order could only be ensured by the *enforced* political, educational, social and economic separation of people of different races and colours is rejected. Such rejection does not automatically imply the acceptance of the contrary – namely of an enforced political, educational, social and economic integration of people solely on the basis of race or colour, but once this ideological illusion is shattered, a new freedom will emerge to consider other options which whites in general are at present too afraid to even mention or debate in public.
- 2.3. The South Africa I do want is one where the removal of all forms of discrimination is undertaken without delay – including the most controversial form, namely political discrimination. In order to move successfully, it is important to recognise that the time is past where whites could any longer



decide the destiny of blacks without full and equal participation by black (African, coloured and Indian) political representation as freely elected or indicated by the black community. It is of vital importance that a forum should be created where such political leadership of blacks should meet with the white political leadership of our country to start planning a joint future for all the inhabitants of the Republic of South Africa and where the legitimate aspirations of the blacks as well as the existing fears of the whites could be faced by all. It is only out of such a crucible of open confrontation and frank discussion of differences that a policy, acceptable to the majority of blacks as well as to the whites, can emerge. The sooner we as whites begin to do so, the more time will be given to us for debate, reflection and decision; the longer we wait, the lesser the opportunity for such negotiations and decisions and the greater the possibility of events outside of our control deciding our future.

2.4. The South Africa I do want is one where the pass law system is repealed and where, after joint consultation and decision by both black and white, a healthy and proper system of the flow of labour be worked out and implemented to safeguard the economic and social well-being of both black and white. Of necessity the question of property ownership will have to be faced and decided, as well as the labour rights of all Africans now still regarded as migrant labourers. All these issues will have to be thrashed out between black and white to come a consensus of opinion.

2.5. The South Africa I do want is one in which a system of free, equal and compulsory education should be available for all children between 6 and 16 years; where state-subsidised universities should be open to students of all races and where the same principle should apply to schools but where, as an interim measure, parents should be free to choose whether they wish their children to attend multi-racial schools or not. Such a system would immediately start breaking down many of the existing barriers of ignorance, estrangement and prejudice which have strangled the vast potential of educational and human advancement in our midst. It will also dispel many of the fears in the minds of whites that Africans, whites, coloureds and Indians cannot benefit from a common form of education. It could in fact be the beginning of a new era in our history.

And if the hackneyed question is again posed of where the money required to supplement this step will have to come from, my answer would be in the form of two counter-questions: Where does the R1 350 million required for defence come from? Where does the government intend to obtain the R102 million required to establish a Bantu television service?

2.6. The South Africa I do want is one where we as whites take seriously the criticism and feelings of growing resentment on the part of the black community in general (and the African community in particular) towards the present capitalist system and where an in-depth study is jointly planned and participated in by black and white on the whole issue of capitalism, socialism

(with special emphasis on African socialism) and the concept of economic justice. This could be preceded by a number of smaller regional multiracial conferences or symposia to get a reliable assessment of the nature and trend of black thought in this regard. It is not good enough to sing the praises of the system of capitalist free enterprise or to warn against the danger of a black socialist (or even Marxist) system which could be imposed on South Africa if black majority rule materialises. It has to start with an honest admission of the serious failure of the capitalist system in procuring greater economic justice for the majority of the inhabitants of our country; it has to continue with an honest critical appraisal of the weaknesses and injustices inherent in all economic systems – capitalist, socialist as well as Marxist; and it has to lead to the evolvement of a system which will bring about much more equitable sharing in economic wealth and distribution of goods of our country than has been the case up till now. *Only* in this way could South Africa hope to face victoriously the onslaught of communist ideology and indoctrination in the economic as well as other spheres of life. Nothing less could meet successfully the legitimate demands for economic justice for all.

If there is any doubt about my interpretation of black techniques, then please listen to Rev. Simon Gqubule, principal of the Federal Theological Seminary at Edendale who, in a recent address at a service of intercession held in Pietermaritzburg on May 21, said the following:

“Everywhere in the country there is talk of violence and communism. We do not want violence or guns or communism. All we want is the right to move and make our homes anywhere in this country, the right to a proper education; we want equal pay for equal work; we want equal taxation so that we may derive equal benefits; we want to have a share in the law-making and decision-making bodies of this country; we want justice and equal opportunities in every sphere for all people; we want freedom of association and security of life with our wives and children. We want no war, no violence, no communism. I would prefer to die extending the area of freedom and justice for *all* the people of this fair land rather than die defending apartheid. Where should your sons rather be dying? On the borders defending apartheid or within South Africa fighting for justice and the extension of human rights to all South Africans?”

2.7. The South Africa I want is one where the whole student community, black as well as white, separately as well as jointly, prepares itself for a meaningful and responsible participation in the changes I have indicated above, if we wish to avoid an open conflict of violence and bloodshed and bring about meaningful and peaceful change. It would require that you as students should

first of all decide quite clearly in your own minds what kind of South Africa you wish to live in and live for; next you should decide whether you sincerely believe that you could make some contribution – however small – to the establishment and furtherance of such a society; thirdly, you should be quite clear in your minds that change is not going to occur overnight and that extensive sacrifices in standards of living, economic comforts, social privileges and cultural opportunities would have to be made by you as part of the white community if you wish to make a meaningful contribution to the future of our country. If you wish to become involved and to remain involved you will have to face the fact of increased government action against you – as the black students and scholars of our county have to face day by day; (if you are not willing to do so, then I would plead with you not to further aggravate or intensify an already tense situation by comfortably withdrawing from the struggle by happily enjoying the fruits of an exploitative system and then to depart from South Africa when the threat to economic security and political power develops to a real danger point).

I do not need to stress to you the urgency of the situation or the lateness of the hour in emphasising the need for non-violent action to bring about meaningful change. I do need to point out, however, that the ever-growing legal powers of the government are such that it will become increasingly difficult to state, stage or participate in any meaningful protest. More and more it becomes a matter of a choice of conscience by individuals of such a moral choice. Therefore my urgent plea to you today is contained in this one last thought:

If you truly love your county, then decide now – once and for all – what kind of country you wish to give yourself to and then commit yourself to see to it that you have a share in the way such a country is being created and being built – even if it eventually has to be built from the ashes of a society which has destroyed itself through its own blindness, its avarice and its fear. For whatever is going to happen in the intervening period, one thing I know:

A new South Africa is being born – a South Africa in which I wish to live, a South Africa in which I wish our children to live, a South Africa in which I wish to give myself to all the people of our land.

# HOSPITALITY AND TRUTH-TELLING: REVISITING THE WITNESS OF BEYERS NAUDÉ<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Robert R. Vosloo<sup>2</sup>

## 1. Introduction

I first heard the name of Beyers Naudé when, as a high school student, I overheard a conversation in which he was branded as a dangerous communist. This perception of Beyers Naudé was reinforced for many white South Africans in later years by the infamous photograph showing Beyers Naudé at a funeral in Cradock against the backdrop of a communist flag. While Naudé later noted in his autobiography, *My land van hoop*, that he was unaware of the presence of this flag, the name Beyers Naudé was for many not equated with the unrelenting search for truth and justice, but was linked to labels such as communist, traitor and dissident. This symbolizes something of the enclosed mindset within the Afrikaner community that continued to demonize any voices that dared to critique the unjust and inhuman system of apartheid.

My prior perceptions of Beyers Naudé were markedly challenged in the late 1980s by a visit to the home of Beyers and Ilse Naudé in Greenside, Johannesburg. This visit, which was in later years followed by other meetings with Oom Bey, was part of a series of student ecumenical tours organized by the Dutch Reformed Student Church in Stellenbosch. Carel Anthonissen, one of the pastors at this congregation, played an important role in organizing these encounters. He also was previously pastor at the DRC congregation Aasvoëlkop in Johannesburg (the congregation which Naudé left in 1963) and he knew the Naudés well. For many of us these tours were powerful, emotional and liberating events that shattered many deeply-embedded myths and preconceived ideas with which we grew up. They also opened new and exciting vistas by bringing us into contact with communities and people who embodied, through their struggle and witness, something that felt genuine, joyous and hopeful. Visiting Beyers and Ilse Naudé's Greenside home was an encounter that has left a deep and lasting impression on me. We were struck by Oom Bey's clear and straightforward conversation. We sensed that he took us seriously, that he was willing to engage with us, facing even the toughest issues. One recollection that comes to mind with regard to these visits is the generous hospitality of the Naudés. It was our experience that they opened their home as well as their hearts. For me, their hospitality was even more significant in the light of the fact that Beyers Naudé previously spent seven years under house

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<sup>1</sup> Paper presented at the mini-conference "Oom Bey for the Future", Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology, Faculty of Theology, University of Stellenbosch on 24 August 2005.

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arrest and thus was confined to his home. In this paper I will use the related notions of “hospitality” and “the home” as lenses to reflect on the legacy of Beyers Naudé, in addition to reflection on the implications of this legacy for us today.

## 2. On hospitality and the home

Hospitality is the welcoming openness towards the other and otherness – towards the stranger, strangeness and even estrangement. One finds the concept and practice of hospitality, in one form or another, in most cultures and religions. This led Jacques Derrida to say, “Hospitality – this is culture itself.”<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, history is also littered with many monuments to inhospitality and exclusion. Apartheid and neo-apartheid can be viewed as forms of anti-hospitality that emphasise enclosed constructions of identity, with the concomitant inability to engage with the other and otherness, also otherness within the self. In the process self and community easily become insulated from the gift of meaningful communion.

Hospitality is strongly associated with metaphors relating to the home. It recalls the idea of an open home in which there is space for others. One can argue, furthermore, that an ethos of hospitality also challenges false constructions of “home”. Phil Cohen suggests in his book *Home Rules: Some Reflections on Racism and Nationalism in Everyday Life* that all xenophobia has the ideal of a secure home as its sense-giving metaphor.<sup>4</sup> The image of a secure home transforms that which is “not-home” or “outside of home” into a terrain fraught with danger whose inhabitants are viewed as a constant threat.<sup>5</sup> In the process the home becomes a defensible space; something to be protected against the onslaughts of the stranger. The home becomes a place in the midst of chaos where order and decency reign. While it is certainly true that the home is, and must be, a space that denotes safety and enjoyment, there is a real danger that a mindset of security can construct “home” as the exclusive space *par excellence*. It is thus necessary to challenge certain constructions of the notion of “home”. We need to be critical of formulations that construct “home” as an enclosed space that excludes the other and otherness. The philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (in a remarkable paragraph entitled “The dwelling” in his book *Totality and Infinity*) makes the important point that even the home is not “owned.” One is a guest in one’s own home. One is never the master of the house. Levinas writes: “The home that founds possession

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<sup>3</sup> Derrida, J. 2002. *Acts of Religion* (ed. Gil Anidjar). New York: Routledge, p. 361. Derrida makes this remark in a chapter meaningfully entitled “Hostipitality” (he uses this term to show the ambiguity of hospitality – *hostis* means enemy). Derrida’s remark about hospitality as culture is preceded by his statement, “Not only is there a culture of hospitality, but there is no culture that is not also a culture of hospitality” (p. 361).

<sup>4</sup> Cohen, P. 1993. *Home Rules: Some Reflections on Racism and Nationalism in Everyday Life*. London: University of East London, The New Ethnicities Unit. See also Bauman, Z. 1995. *Life in Fragments: Essays on Postmodern Morality*. Oxford: Blackwell, p. 135.

<sup>5</sup> Bauman, *Life in Fragments*, p. 135.

is not a possession in the same sense as the moveable goods it can collect and keep. It is possessed because it already and henceforth is hospitable to its proprietor.”<sup>6</sup> Hospitality (or, what Levinas calls, “the welcome”) precedes ownership. Levinas also writes: “Recollection in a home open to the Other – hospitality – is the concrete and initial fact of human recollection and separation; it coincides with the desire for the Other absolutely transcendent.”<sup>7</sup> This suggests that the banning of otherness and the Other from the home (both physically and mentally) is, in a certain sense, a sign of being closed towards the advent of the transcendent. In the process the Other is not only excluded, the self is also imprisoned. It is the home that is open to the Other that is ethical, that is a home in the true sense of the word.

I have already referred to the hospitality our group of students experienced at the home of the Naudés in Greenside, an experience shared by many others. However, these reflections on the home and hospitality also point to more than the opening of one’s domicile to the other. It is also closely intertwined with the willingness to open one’s *identity* to the other, and also to see oneself *as* another (to use the title of an influential book by Paul Ricoeur). Our reflection on the legacy of Beyers Naudé cannot be separated from the way in which his life serves as a courageous prophetic critique against the destructive mindset of enclosed identity. His life serves as a testimony to the hope that arises when one risks it with others for the sake of truth and justice. While growing up in the context of a house typified by a strict sense of Afrikaner identity, he allowed himself in the course of his life to be opened to other people and other ideas, and to act boldly (and some might add, often naively) in the light of these encounters. It is ironic that the banning order, which had the goal of limiting his influence, actually led to many more such encounters in his own home, where visitors were to be encouraged by his welcoming openness and pastoral concern.

The story of Beyers Naudé’s house arrest, what he would later call his “seven lean years,” is well-known. Following the Soweto protests of 1976 and the death of Steve Biko, the Christian Institute, together with several other organisations, was banned in 1977. The offices of the CI were raided and closed and many documents were confiscated. A banning order was served on Naudé that prohibited free social contact with others and put tremendous strain on his family life and friendships: he could not leave the magisterial district of Johannesburg; he could only meet socially with one person at a time; he could not attend meetings; he could not speak in public or write anything for publication, and it was considered unlawful to quote him. But for Naudé this was also a time of enrichment through counselling and reflection. He wrote: “Through all these years there was a constant contact between myself and others. One by one they came, black and

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<sup>6</sup> Levinas, E. 1961. *Totality and Infinity*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, p. 157.

<sup>7</sup> Levinas. *Totality and Infinity*, p. 172.

white, old and young, early in the morning and late at night ... in and through it I gained tremendous insight into the life, the needs, the hopes and fears of many different people.”<sup>8</sup>

Naudé also mentions that during this time he reflected more deeply than ever before on the rise and crisis of the Afrikaner people, on the English liberal tradition, on the situation facing both black and white students to discover for themselves what future they would like to face, on the growth of black political power and the emergence of trade unions and on the position of churches and the role of Christian faith in our country.

After the lifting of the banning order, Naudé wrote: “My seven lean years were over – the longest and leanest years of my life. No, I am wrong: Upon reflection I realize that in all probability they were the most difficult, but certainly the most enriching experience of my life because the banning brought to fruition many latent insights, feeling, visions and hopes”.<sup>9</sup>

One cannot help but note the irony. The power of an open heart prevailed against attempts to imprison it. As the proverb goes: “If there is room in the heart, there is room in the house”. The legacy of Beyers Naudé encourages us to continue to critique enclosed notions of identity. Today we are faced with new kinds of enclosed mentalities that find subtle expression in our constructions of notions such as “the home”, “the family” and “the market.” Driven by the powerful hegemony of the market, we are tempted, for instance, to live isolated and consumerised lives, closing our eyes and hearts to injustice in our globalising world. Or, we are tempted to succumb to a lifestyle that seeks to find security from perceived chaos and change in a fundamentalist attitude. I realise that the label of fundamentalism is not always helpful and that it cannot be separated from globalization, but nevertheless we need to be mindful of the temptation of fundamentalism (in all its different guises). The danger of fundamentalism, or however we name false and fearful reactions to change that find solace in fixed rules and final answers without sensitivity to complexity and ambiguity, is that it uglifies the self, it turns community into a sect, and God into a projection of our fears. In short: it stifles life.

The notion of hospitality encompasses a critique against these false constructions of identity. It implies a welcoming openness towards the other and otherness, an openness that cannot be separated from the sensitivity toward justice. Towards the end of his autobiography (published in 1995) Naudé looks to the future and mentions four interdependent priorities which express his concerns, i.e. the ecumenical movement, economic justice, the problem of corruption and the

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<sup>8</sup> Naudé, C F B. 1985. “My Seven Lean Years”, *JTSA* 51, 1985:5. See also Ryan, C. 1990. *Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith*, Cape Town: David Philip 1-3, 193-203. Also Naudé, *My land van hoop*, p. 109-123.

<sup>9</sup> Naudé, *JTSA*, p. 14.

challenge to seek truth and reconciliation. In the section on economic justice, he notes that he is struck in his reading of the Old and the New Testament by the commands given with regard to the care for the poor, widows, strangers, refugees and the marginalised. He also asks the question: "Is wealthy Sandton, just a few kilometres away from poverty-stricken Alexandra ... not a striking, visible symptom of the problem not only South Africa, but a large part of the world is struggling with today."<sup>10</sup> In reflecting today on "Oom Bey for the future" this haunting question on economic justice continues to ask for a response. We are challenged to face this seemingly overwhelming task in courageous and creative ways. But maybe we can also in this regard drink from the wells of Beyers Naudé. It is worthwhile to keep the words that he spoke at a lecture at Rhodes University on 1 April 1985 before us: "Listen first to the voice of the voiceless, hear the cry of the oppressed, consider the power of the powerless ... become involved in a new society in which the recognition of human dignity, human rights and human responsibility forms the basis on which the future of the country is built".<sup>11</sup>

### 3. Being welcomed

Reflecting on the legacy of "Oom Bey for the future" in the light of the notion of just hospitality does not only centre on the exclusion the Naudés experienced or welcoming openness that they embodied. Rather, one also has to acknowledge the immense hospitality given to them by the communities in which they also found acceptance. The stories of these welcoming communities need to be remembered and retold. It is unthinkable to try and apprehend the legacy of Beyers Naudé without reference to the role played by these communities in sustaining his witness. In this regard we can think of the acceptance found within the broader ecumenical movement, within resistance communities, and within the congregation in Alexandra. This reminds us that hospitality is not only about welcoming, but also, and maybe even primarily, about *being welcomed*, about *receiving* hospitality. It is about hosts becoming guests and guests becoming hosts in a way that challenges and subverts oppressive and limiting hierarchies of power.

Beyers Naudé ends his autobiography with a short section in which he mentions the invitation by the Dutch Reformed Church congregation Aasvoëlkop to come and preach there on 13<sup>th</sup> of August 1995 (32 years after his painful separation from the congregation). For Naudé this was an emotional event, a sign of hope, a symbol of the reconciliation needed within the Dutch Reformed Church family,

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<sup>10</sup> Naudé, *My land van hoop*, p. 145. Poignancy is added to this question by the fact that Beyers Naudé's funeral was held at Aasvoëlkop Congregation in a wealthy suburb in Johannesburg, the same congregation that he left in 1963, but that his ashes were then taken to Alexandra. This is a challenging gesture for the Dutch Reformed Church family. It can also be read as a wider challenge to see the interconnectedness of the destinies of rich and poor, first and third worlds.

<sup>11</sup> Naudé, *My land van hoop*, p. 126.



reconciliation also necessary for all churches and for our country. The section has the meaningful heading “Tuiskoms” (“Homecoming”). Upon reading these words, one cannot help but be saddened by the lack of progress in this regard within the Dutch Reformed family of churches. The legacy of Beyers Naudé continues to challenge churches (also the churches within the whole family of Dutch Reformed Churches) to embody hospitality through the willingness to take risks with each other in vulnerability and obedience. This implies the willingness to welcome, to re-welcome and to be welcomed. One can also recall here the words of a friend of Beyers Naudé, the theologian Willie Jonker, at the end of his autobiography, entitled *Selfs die kerk kan verander*. Jonker writes: “Waar die stryd die afgelope veertig jaar hoofsaaklik om die deurbreking van die volkskerkkarakter van die NG Kerk gegaan het, sal dit in die volgende dekades waarskynlik om die uitbouing van die eenheid van die NG familie van kerke gaan, sowel as om die bewaring van die gereformeerde karakter van hierdie kerke en hulle profetiese roeping in die samelewing”.<sup>12</sup> (While the struggle of the past forty years was mainly to challenge the DRC as a *volkskerk*, the following decades will probably involve the development of unity within the Dutch Reformed Church family, as well as the conservation of the reformed character of these churches and their prophetic role within society.) [My translation – RRV]

#### 4. Truth-telling, the child and the future

Hospitality is not to be equated with the mere romanticised openness towards otherness. Alternatively: hospitality cannot be separated from truth-telling. It is about being *pro veritate*, for the truth. It is about confessing the truth,<sup>13</sup> about living the truth. Therefore one must be careful not to make a false separation between a pastoral and a prophetic responsibility. Those who are willing “to tell the truth” are often the best pastors. The way in which Beyers Naudé combined truth-telling (often in a rather reckless manner) with pastoral concern serves as an important reminder not to erect false dichotomies that merely serve the status quo and result in the neglect of the prophetic task.

Hospitality and truth-telling: these are two words that find resonance in me with regard to the witness and legacy of Beyers Naudé. The challenge is to embody

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<sup>12</sup> Jonker, W. 1998. *Selfs die kerk kan verander*, Kaapstad: Tafelberg, p. 221.

<sup>13</sup> Beyers Naudé saw important parallels between the situation in South Africa and that of Nazi Germany. In 1965 he wrote a number of articles in *Pro Veritate* arguing that it is time for a “Confessing Church”. See “Die tyd vir ‘n ‘belydende kerk’ is daar” (July 15 1965); “Nogeens die ‘belydende kerk’” (November 1965) and “Nou juis die ‘belydende kerk’” (December 15, 1965). Here he challenges what he saw as the dangerous silence of the churches: “Why did you stay silent when you had to talk?” (“En sal die verwyt nie by name die kerk toegewerp word nie, waar God met reg eis dat die profetiese stem gehoor moet word om te getuig teen alle verkragting van reg en geregtigheid, liefde en waarheid?”) December 15, p. 4. (And will the church not be reproached by name where God with good reason demands that the prophetic voice be heard to bear witness against all violation of law and justice, love and truth?) [My translation – RRV]

these concepts in new in creative way in our complex and changing world. This probably requires different arguments and actions than those spoken and performed by Beyers Naudé. Maybe our time asks for greater hermeneutical sensitivity and for a thicker theological description of reality. Nonetheless, the words and witness of Beyers Naudé, and the communities sustaining him, will continue to be a guiding light in this regard.

I think that the legacy of Beyers Naude is best honoured when his witness is not abstracted from life. As Charles Villa-Vicencio reminds us:

“Contrary to the opinion of those who admire him from a distance and turn him into a mystical icon of their cult, he is a human being. He has made his mistakes. He can be a stubbornly independent person, quite reckless with passionate abandon, and over-enthusiastic about ideas that cannot work. He can be a terrible judge of human character, and then fiercely loyal to colleagues and friends even in the face of the most damning evidence against them. All this has a time hehad a way of driving his closest friends to near despair.”<sup>14</sup>

And Jean Knighton-Fitt refers in a biography on Theo and Helen Kotze, entitled *Beyond Fear*, to the remark of a colleague, by no means unlovingly expressed, that “Beyers was unable to say ‘no’, and that mixed up with his magnanimity was an excessive naiveté about people’s contributions. He embraced a lot of fools as well as prophets!”<sup>15</sup>

Beyers Naudé had the “will to embrace” (to use Miroslav Volf’s term) and maybe he embraced prophets and fools. This suggests the need for combining embrace with discernment, or hospitality with wisdom. Also with regard to hospitality we need, as Richard Kearney notes, at crucial moments to discern the other in the alien and the alien in the other.”<sup>16</sup>

Although such discernment is certainly necessary, there is also something valuable in a certain naiveté and childlikeness. Maybe the attraction of (and reaction against) the life of Beyers Naudé partly resided in the fact that this person, who was for many a kind of parent figure, remained in some ways childlike. This resulted in a certain recklessness, but maybe it was also this quality that made it possible for him to hope, to believe in the future, to see the Kingdom. As Bonhoeffer writes:

“To-let-oneself-be-defined by means of the future is the eschatological possibility of the child. The child (full of anxiety and

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<sup>14</sup> Villa-Vicencio, C and De Gruchy, J. 1985. *Resistance and Hope: South African Essays in Honour of Beyers Naudé*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, p. 13.

<sup>15</sup> Knighton-Fitt, J. 2003. *Beyond Fear*. Cape Town: Pretext, p. 140.

<sup>16</sup> Kearney, R. 2003. *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness*. London: Routledge, p. 67.

bliss) sees itself in the power of what 'future things' will bring, and for that reason it can only live in the present ... It is only out of the future that the present can be lived."<sup>17</sup>

The legacy of Beyers Naudé calls us to embody hospitality and truth-telling in new and creative ways. But it also helps us to be open to the surprise of the future. This is the gift that enables what Kierkegaard called the passion for the possible, or maybe even more importantly, the passion for the seemingly impossible.

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<sup>17</sup> Bonhoeffer, D. 1996. *Act and Being*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, p. 159.

Beyers Naudé

Scripture reading: Col. 3:5-11; Rev. 21:1-6

Col. 3:9-11: "Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all."<sup>2</sup>

Rev. 21:5: "He who was seated on the throne said: 'I am making everything new!'"<sup>3</sup>

Here we have two pronouncements on renewal, both by well-known leaders in the young Christian Church of the New Testament. Both are writing from a situation of imprisonment – Paul to the Colossians from prison in Rome and John from his imprisonment on the island of Patmos. Both write of the old and the new life: Paul on his vision of the new life of the Christian in this world, our daily life, of our work and service from day to day and John on his vision of the eventual appearance of Kingdom of God, the new heaven and the new earth. In his rich symbolic language and, for the Christians of his time, in familiar Old Testament images, he gives a view of what the Kingdom of God someday will be like. This he summarizes in one sentence: "He who was seated on the throne said: 'I am making everything new!'"

You as student community are at the beginning of a new academic year; for many of you this it is also the beginning of your academic career. You are also at the beginning of a week in which important, yes, perhaps a decisive choice has to be made by the white South African electorate of about 3 million that will determine the future, not only of 30 million inhabitants of South Africa, but also of the whole of Africa. At first glance this seems to be a political decision. But on a deeper level this decision reflects two different views, two divergent visions of the future of a society of approximately 30 million people of all races - approximately 30 million people, of all races, social stations and languages and of both sexes, who regard South Africa as their fatherland. The keyword that summarises the one vision of

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon delivered at the Stellenbosch student congregation of the DRC on 15 March 1992.

<sup>2</sup> NIV

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

the future is *power-sharing*, the keyword that summarises the other is *self-determination*.

The result of this decision will also deeply affect the Church (especially the family of Dutch Reformed Churches). This is because the Church of Christ also lives by a vision: The vision of the new life in Christ in this world, day after day (Col. 3:9-11), but it also lives by a vision of the future, of the Kingdom, not only of heaven, but also of earth (Rev. 21:5). Sometimes this vision of the Kingdom of God and that of earthly governments coincides; sometimes they come into conflict with each other. For the Christian who wants to be obedient to the gospel, it creates a serious dilemma when this happens. The Christian takes his discipleship seriously and above all wants to be obedient and faithful to Jesus Christ, the head of the Church. And this obedience does not only apply to political decisions, but to the whole of our Christian existence, to all aspects of our lives: personal, social, economic and cultural, to church and religion. When we as Christians are faced with such a dilemma, is there any way in which the gospel can help us? I am convinced that the gospel gives us a clear answer, but only after we have ascertained the following: what is the essence, the true nature, the centre of the Kingdom of God to which we belong?

In answering this question I would like to point out three things that, according to my understanding of the Old and New Testaments, are the vital characteristics of the Kingdom of God:

1. *A kingdom of love*: The gospel calls love - of God and of neighbour - the heart of our Christian faith. It forms the heart of what we confess every Sunday. This love encompasses all notions such as human dignity, tolerance and forgivingness. Where these notions and attitudes are absent in human relationships, or are being disregarded, there is no love (1 Cor. 13).
2. *A kingdom of justice*: Have you ever noticed, in reading through the Old and New Testaments, how many references there are to justice and righteousness? Surely you would have thought about the implications of this command, of the search for truth, for humaneness, and the rejection of double-dealing, treachery, fraud? Where these ethical values are absent or are being violated, there is no truth and no justice!
3. *A kingdom of obedience based on faith*: There are many pronouncements in the Bible related to this characteristic, but perhaps the most comprehensive of these is the significant pronouncement in Colossians 3:11: "Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free..." Neither nationality (Greek or Jew), religious tradition (circumcised or uncircumcised), ethnicity (speaking another language), nor cultural sophistication (uncivilized) or social standing (slave or free), but indeed that "...Christ is all, and is in all".

You as students will have to make many decisions during this coming and every year. In the state of uncertainty in which our country finds itself you will probably have to make more important decisions in a much shorter time than I, for example, had made during the same stage of my lifetime. My plea, my prayer, is that you will choose in such a way that you may say: "My primary concern was for the Kingdom of God and my obedience to this Kingdom. I have decided thus in order to be able to say: 'Here Christ is all and in all.'"

# BEYERS NAUDÉ AND BRAM FISCHER: A DIFFERENT DISSIDENCE<sup>1</sup>

Yvonne H. Malan<sup>2</sup>

## 1. Introduction and Background

In his speech at the first Bram Fischer memorial lecture former president Nelson Mandela declared, “[i]n any history written of our country two Afrikaner names will be always remembered... one is Beyers Naudé. The other is Bram Fischer.” Fischer and Naudé are often cited as beacons of hope, as heroic figures who went against their ‘own people’ in the struggle for a non-racial South Africa. Although they never met, Fischer wrote a letter of support to Naudé, encouraging him to stay the course (Clingman, 1998: 375).

Both had the ability to transcend their own backgrounds, without forsaking their identities as Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans. Stephen Clingman (1998: 456), in *Bram Fischer: Afrikaner Revolutionary* writes – and it is equally true of Beyers Naudé,

“He came out of Afrikaner nationalism; he died belonging to the whole of South Africa. He never saw this as a betrayal of Afrikaner identity, but rather as its fulfilment, its extension towards the true meaning of the name ‘African’. He was a white man able to undertake, in the course of his own life, the personal transformation that must accompany, if not herald, the political. At a time when it would have been almost unimaginable to say so, instinctively and by conviction he understood that if whites were to have a meaning and a future in South Africa, this was the kind of change they would have to undergo. And so he took it on – a story of identity, its retention and extension, into the marrow of his own life.”

Much has been written about Beyers Naudé’s legacy, and deservedly so. Bram Fischer has been a lesser-known figure in (official) South African history, since he died a prisoner, on 8 May 1975, and his image and words were therefore banned. (Consequently, I will be placing more emphasis on his biographical details). The first full biography on Fischer appeared in 1998, an incredibly well researched and poetic book by Stephen Clingman. This was followed in 2002 by Martin

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<sup>1</sup> Paper read at the mini-conference entitled “Oom Bey for the Future” hosted by the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Stellenbosch on 24 August 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Yvonne Malan studied and lectured in philosophy at Stellenbosch University. She is currently completing a doctorate in political science, with a focus on South Africa’s Truth Commission and public memory at Oxford University.

Meredith's *Fischer's Choice*. Fischer was again in the news in August 2003 when he became the first lawyer to be posthumously reinstated to the Bar. (He was disbarred shortly before his imprisonment and legislation had to be introduced to reinstate him, dubbed the Bram Fischer Act)

Fischer and Naudé are powerful examples of the individual's struggle to follow his or her conscience, despite the consequences. At the same time they also illustrate the complexity of resistance and the role that the shaping of identity plays in the decisions that people take. Both of them chose to oppose apartheid, but were informed by different backgrounds and understanding of their identity.

Abram (Bram) Fischer was born on 23 April 1908 into a prominent Afrikaner family. Bram was the grandson and namesake of the last prime minister of the Republic of the Orange Free State and his father, Percy, was a respected lawyer, judge of the Free State Supreme Court and later Judge-President of the Free State. He attended Grey College in Bloemfontein, and Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar. Bram Fischer was born into a life of privilege and a family legacy that assured him contacts at the highest level of society, which would have made any number of prominent positions, including a political career, possible. He was an outstanding lawyer and could have easily followed in his father's footsteps in becoming a judge. However, he chose a different route and died as political prisoner serving a life sentence for treason.

Beyers Naudé came from a different background to Fischer and his decision to resist apartheid came along another route. The decision that Naudé took in 1963 to quit the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) and to take up the directorship of the non-racial Christian Institute came after years of doubt and fear. He was a member of the Afrikaner Broederbond (AB) and fully supported the rise to power of DF Malan's National Party, but his unease with the biblical justification of apartheid grew increasingly stronger. At that stage, however, to take a public stand in direct opposition to the race policies of his government, his church and the Broederbond was a bridge too far. He had encountered enough warnings from colleagues in the church and the Broederbond to realise that speaking out would place his future in grave jeopardy.

Fischer might have been the grandson of Abraham Fischer, but he grew up in an environment that fostered a fairly open-ended view of identity. For example: while Beyers Naudé's father had strong views on the promotion of Afrikaans, Fischer spoke and corresponded with his family members in both Afrikaans and English.

Apart from his family one of the earliest influences on Fischer was Leo Marquard, his teacher at Grey College. He exposed the young Fischer to multiracial gatherings and critical political debate, encouraging him to question the route that



Afrikaner politics was taking even at an early age - something that happened much later for Naudé.

Ever since his youth Fischer had strong anti-imperialist sentiments, as did Naudé. Both of their fathers supported the 1914 Rebellion. As a pupil at Grey College Fischer led a (successful) rebellion against the school's planned involvement with the visit by a member of the British royal family, and also refused to take part in the cadet activities. These sentiments, however, never translated into a narrow view of identity that needed a hostile other (English or Black). After matriculating at Grey College, Fischer attended the English-dominated University of Cape Town and not the neighbouring Afrikaner bastion, Stellenbosch University. This is in contrast to Naudé who not only attended Stellenbosch University, but was also very much co-opted (via his residence and membership of the Students' Representative Council) into its Afrikaner nationalist culture. Stellenbosch, of course, provided many of the future National Party leaders and John Vorster was a contemporary of Naudé.

Fischer's anti-imperialist sentiments were channelled in a different direction that made his membership of the Communist Party a continuation of the views he had harboured since youth. To him there was no contradiction between his grandfather's involvement in the Anglo Boer War, his father's role in the Rebellion, and his own involvement in South Africa's struggle for liberation. His family shared this view. As Clingman (1998: 181) points out, "[t]he experience of being on the receiving end for your political beliefs was familiar and respectable for the Fischer family".

It could be argued that Fischer's decision to resist apartheid was less of a sudden Damascus experience than was the case for Naudé - perhaps because he did not see it as a radical break from his identity. Fischer travelled much further than Naudé and the results of his actions were more radical. He was accused of treason and imprisoned for the rest of his life. Yet he never left his Afrikaner genealogy behind.

It could perhaps also be argued that Fischer's profession allowed more opportunities to resist apartheid. Although he built his reputation on commercial law cases, he played a crucial role in both the Treason and Rivonia Trials. Despite his 'radical' politics, he was elected president of the Bar Council, and was respected by those who opposed his politics (Clingman 1998: 117).<sup>3</sup> He combined his activism, with his skill as a lawyer making him one of South Africa's first human rights lawyers, before the term was even coined. This is in contrast to Naudé, where supporting Afrikaner nationalism was practically part and parcel of

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<sup>3</sup> Issy Maisels, a lawyer and friend of Fischer, happened to meet with Justice Rumpff (the judge at the Treason Trial) shortly after Fischer's death. Rumpff told Maisels, "He will be remembered long after you and I are forgotten" (Clingman 1998: 440).

the job description of ministers in the white Dutch Reformed Church. Durand (1985: 39) argues that,

“[the] impression that one gets is one of inevitability. Given the interplay of these forces with Afrikanerdom’s political and socio-economic history, the end result seems to be unsurprising and a forgone conclusion. The only surprising thing ... is that a few dissident voices were at all able to make themselves heard within the seemingly monolithic theological structures of the Dutch Reformed Church”.

Fischer’s profession allowed him a space – and the tools – ‘within’ the system to resist apartheid. Yet in the end, breaking and fleeing from the law became inevitable, which was traumatic for Fischer, given his profound respect for the law.

The courageous choices made by both men caused them to be regarded as traitors by the Afrikaner establishment. *Die Burger* called Fischer a lost son.<sup>4</sup> Shortly after his sentencing, *Die Burger* ran a special supplement on the “Tragedy of Bram Fischer”, trying, in disbelief, to find reasons for his “betrayal” (*Die Burger* 7 Mei 1966, *Bylae*, pp. 1-3). And yet, for Fischer himself it could not be more different. His daughter, Ilse, recalls,

“[h]e saw his commitment to change as a natural progression from Afrikaner nationalism ... That was the family history – the Boer War and the Rebellion ... it was a whole anti-imperialism struggle. And Bram saw it as a continuation of the struggle, just extending beyond the Afrikaner to include all people” (quoted by Krog, 1998: 203).

Fischer came from ‘Afrikaner nobility’ yet, unlike Naudé, he was never a member of the Afrikaner Broederbond. He harboured strong nationalist sentiments and was a Hertzog supporter, but he never viewed his involvement in liberation politics as turning his back on his Afrikaner heritage. Fischer, as mentioned above, quite clearly grew up in an environment that fostered a more open-ended idea of identity, but that does not mean that his journey was without struggle. In his statement from the dock Fischer recalls,

“I was a Nationalist at the age of six, if not before... remained a Nationalist for over twenty years thereafter and became, in 1929, the first Nationalist Prime Minister of a student parliament ... I never doubted that the policy of segregation was the only solution to this country’s problems until the Hitler theory of race superiority began

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<sup>4</sup> Mandela (1995b: 459) writes “[n]o matter what I suffered in my pursuit of freedom, I always took strength from the fact that I was fighting with and for my own people. Bram was a free man who fought against his own people to ensure the freedom of others.”

to threaten the world with genocide and with the greatest disaster in all history.” (Fischer, 1966: par 126-7).

## 2. Of legacy and remembrance

Bram Fischer died a prisoner in 1975. It would be nearly twenty more years before he would have seen the fulfilment of his ideals. Clingman (1998: 456) writes,

“he presented the reverse image of a Nelson Mandela...the towering figure who lived to enter the promised land...Bram, in contrast, was the one to succumb...dying because there was no place for him except in some non-existent future”.

Following his death, there were deliberate and malicious actions by the state to remove his memory from the public sphere. Since he died serving a life sentence, it was an offence to reproduce photos of him. The result was that history books only carried the outlines of Fischer’s profile, his face whitened out. His words, too, were banned and his statement from the dock was reproduced only in fragments. Perhaps the cruellest action was that of the Department of Prisons, who confiscated his ashes days after the funeral. After South Africa’s transition to democracy, questions were asked in Parliament as to the whereabouts of Fischer’s remains. It emerged that a prison official had scattered them approximately a year after his death at an unknown location.

Until the 1990s Fischer remained a silhouette, a ghost-like figure, which was absent yet present, a trace. Yet, Fischer’s traces, in a different sense, are everywhere. As Antjie Krog (1998:202) rightly points out (in *Country of My Skull*), “his life seems to have touched the lives of so many people – even after his death”. Fischer had a profound influence on some of those who lived to see the post-1994 South Africa, and specifically on a number of individuals who played a crucial role in shaping that reality. Nelson Mandela (1995: 84), his client and friend, in *A Long Walk to Freedom*, writes with great warmth and respect of Fischer’s courage and integrity, as well as of their friendship. Arthur Chaskalson, who served as junior counsel on some of the political cases in which Fischer was involved, became the president of the Constitutional Court. George Bizos became a prominent legal figure, involved in numerous political trials. Fittingly, he was also involved closely with the application to have Fischer reinstated to the Bar. Above all – returning to Krog’s observation noted earlier – Fischer’s traces are present in the profound effect his singular courage and the complexity of his choices had on others: Clingman (1998: 453) writes,

“it is tempting to think that in [some] way something of Bram had passed – in the best way – into history, infusing the humanising and peacemaking gestures of his being into those he left behind.”

So despite heavy-handed attempts to remove Fischer from memory, his traces remained and were carried on into the future that he helped to create.

Fischer did not live to see the vindication of his beliefs. In contrast to Fischer, Beyers Naudé was, as he himself had often said, fortunate to see the emergence of the 'promised land'. During the years after his banning Naudé received wide recognition in South Africa and abroad. He was, to a certain extent, even 'welcomed back' by many Afrikaners who had come to recognise the injustice of apartheid. At its 1994 General Synod meeting the Dutch Reformed Church offered an apology to Naudé for their rejection of his position; he was welcomed with a standing ovation. In December 2000 Stellenbosch University awarded an honorary doctorate to Naudé, one of many such awards. Others include the Franklin Roosevelt Four Freedoms Award and the Robert Kennedy Human Rights Award. The post-1994 government named bridges and highways after him. It would have been interesting to see what the reaction to Fischer would have been had he survived. The (post-apartheid) government has honoured him, for example, by declaring his boyhood home a heritage site; Commercial Street in Durban was recently renamed Bram Fischer Avenue. Yet, when a building in Bloemfontein was named after him, there was an outcry in letters to the Afrikaans newspaper *Die Volksblad*, complaining that a (white) communist should not be honoured in this way. His memory is preserved in other ways: the annual Bram Fischer Memorial Lecture, the Bram Fischer Memorial Library, and the Bram Fischer Memorial Trust, the latter established by Grey College.<sup>5</sup> But these were actions by friends and colleagues who have tried to commemorate their former comrade. Naudé was welcomed back and honoured by many of the very Afrikaners who called him a traitor. There have been no such attempts to 'reclaim' Fischer. Did his communism and his life sentence make it a bridge too far, even for a man who never denied his Afrikaner background (nor saw his actions as betrayal)?

The storm that was unleashed by Stellenbosch University's decision to award an honorary degree to Fischer is an indication that he, unlike Naudé, remained a 'traitor' to a large section of (mostly older) Afrikaners. The decision to award the degree was made public in the same month that Naudé passed away. Naudé's passing was marked by tributes from all sectors of the South African community, including mainstays of the Afrikaner community. This is in utter contrast to the venomous attacks against Fischer, to a large extent fuelled by various Naspers papers, and *Die Burger's* deputy editor in particular. The so-called 'Fischer debate' was valuable in the sense that a number of closet conservatives and reactionaries 'outed' themselves once and for all. They ranged from the aggressive grouping of Hermann Giliomee and Jacko Maree, whose polemics seemed filled with an almost venomous hatred of Fischer, to the self-absorbed "yes, but" brigade from the FAK (Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Organisations). They had in common a

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<sup>5</sup> This was met with outrage by a number of parents and former pupils.

selective understanding of South African history, mind-boggling self-righteousness, a strong dose of “Afrikaner selfbeheptheid” (Afrikaner narcissism) and a complete disregard for Fischer's extraordinary and courageous life.<sup>6</sup> It is significant that the anti-Fischer crew included Broederbonders and former National Party apartheid-era politicians, who were all white and almost exclusively male. Their melodramatic *modus operandi* was to rant about “die ontbinding van die Afrikanervolk” (dissolution of the Afrikaner people), while resurrecting the “Rooi Gevaar” (Red Peril) (although they more likely meant the “Swart Gevaar” (Black Peril) with great gusto. Their account of South African history makes one wonder if they slept through the whole Truth and Reconciliation Commission process. Why this response to Fischer? I suspect it is because he makes them deeply uncomfortable, even more so than Naudé – and not because of his communism. Fischer, given his family background and own talents, could have achieved great personal success in apartheid South Africa. He could very easily have argued that he wanted to change the system from within. But he chose to do differently and paid a high price for his beliefs. And it is this that makes the old guard nervous. If Fischer was willing to sacrifice an easy life, what excuse do they have for doing nothing? Bram Fischer's personal and moral stature in committing himself to justice for all in South Africa is what his accusers apparently cannot bear. The fact that he showed a different way of being an Afrikaner also seems intolerable to them.

The old guard's reaction is in contrast to a younger generation, racially varied, who have adopted Fischer as an icon. Still, the outpouring of hatred against Fischer in the Afrikaans media is astounding. He was labelled everything from a traitor to a mass murderer, and this nearly thirty years after his death. Fischer became a litmus test for Afrikaners: he exposed those whose commitment to an inclusive South Africa was superficial. Even thirty years after his death, Fischer was still ‘ahead’ of his time. He remained not only a measure of courage, but also of open-ended identity.

### 3. Conclusion

Seen against the background of Naudé's death and the venom against Fischer's honorary degree, these two men remain prototypes. They represent the best of what South Africans, and more specifically Afrikaners, can be and should be. The past ten years have been marked by remarkable reconciliation, but also more recently by increasing militancy among certain Afrikaners, a yearning for the ‘good old days’ and a rejection of an inclusive South Africa. Leopold Scholtz equating apartheid with a kindergarten party (in contrast to colonialism) in a

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<sup>6</sup> See statements made at the Stellenbosch University Convocation meeting on 11 November 2004, letters to *Die Burger* and articles on LitNet (The Fischer seminar). For an account of the Convocation meeting, see also Annie Gagiano's article in the *Mail and Guardian* (3 December 2004).

recent edition of *Die Burger* is but one example of this. The example of Fischer and Naudé, who were fearlessly members of a larger South Africa, long before it was fashionable, is now more important than ever. The example of individuals like Beyers Naudé and Bram Fischer is that one can be proud of one's heritage without being a prisoner of your history. They never abandoned their identities as Afrikaners nor the history in which they were interwoven. Still, they were able to move further; their passion for social justice transcended the limits of a narrow understanding of identity. This is perhaps their most important legacy to our generation: to resist being caught up in narrow definitions of identity, but rather to play with the richness of possibilities; not to hide behind essentialist group identity, but to engage with others. To realise that difference is not something to be feared, but to be embraced.

The younger generation's responsibility is that we must never forget their courage and sacrifice. We must remember that democracy did not come cheaply and that justice is something that must be fought for continually – especially given the way in which some voices in the Afrikaans media have become outspoken apologists for apartheid.

Naudé and Fischer were “for” the future when it was a future that could barely be imagined. Clingman (1998: 449) writes of Fischer, and once again it's equally true of Naudé:

“[F]or Bram, understanding that the future was both known and unknown, he had staked his all on creating it, in fulfilment of the imperative to make humanity meaningful and available to everyone. That was the existential component of his commitment, the moral dimension of his politics, the integrity of his ideology.”

It is up to the younger generation to claim both these men and celebrate the future that their courage has made possible.

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# FROM THE ARCHIVES BEING AN AFRIKANER AND THE AFRIKANER'S ALTERNATIVES FOR THE FUTURE<sup>1</sup>

Beyers Naudé

What and who is an Afrikaner? And, are there any fundamental differences between an ordinary Afrikaner and a true Afrikaner?

There is no consensus of opinion regarding the answer to this question. What constitutes an Afrikaner is understood in a variety of ways: usually it is accepted that Afrikaners are all those who speak Afrikaans as their home language, who have children in Afrikaans schools, who are members of the Afrikaans churches and are members of the Afrikaans-speaking political parties. The difficulty with this answer appears when one considers the so-called leftist Afrikaners. Is Breyten Breytenbach an Afrikaner, or Van Zyl Slabbert, or Beyers Naudé? My own situation is one in which Afrikaans is my home language and I am also a member of the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa. But do my political views, which are to the left of any existing white political party, preclude me from being an Afrikaner? My own definition of an Afrikaner is rather: someone for whom Afrikaans is the language spoken at home and socially. Someone who pursues Afrikaans cultural values, has the highest interests of the Afrikaner people at heart, wants to promote these interests and sees himself as part of Africa, is in my opinion an Afrikaner.

Alternatives for the future<sup>2</sup>

## 1. Afrikaner/Bantu homelands

Unpractical, unattainable, a dream from bygone days, - *Dorsland Trek*.  
Greater part of Afrikaners will not give any real support to this option.  
This ideal simply cannot be realized on a grand scale.

## 2. Leave South Africa – seek future outside of South Africa

Small percentage [of South Africans] might have thought of this – the greater majority will not *or* cannot. (What country will accept and welcome two and three quarters of a million white Afrikaners?)

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<sup>1</sup> Notes made by Beyers Naudé for an address delivered at a meeting of the *Junior Rapportryers* in Randburg on 23 April 1985.

<sup>2</sup> This section in places consists of only cursory notes which are translated as they stand - eds.

### 3. Co-existence in one country

Whether we want to or not, whether we see our way clear or not. I believe that the greater majority of Afrikaners have reached the point where they accept it [the necessity of co-existence] as a given when they say: "In one way or another we will have to learn how to co-exist with people of different languages, colour and views." However, here the ways of the majority of Afrikaners diverge from those of the blacks:

#### *3.1 Policy of reform*

New constitution, tricameral parliament, gradual removal of discrimination, racist laws – and now, the announcement of general South African citizenship in one form or another.

#### *3.2 Difficulties*

Opposition from the right – therefore very slow-moving process.

Process so slow that it could easily take 15-20 years before fundamental change occurs.

Will this satisfy the political aspirations of the majority of blacks? At the moment the answer to this question is a categorical "NO!" Because:

No acceptance of the new constitution.

No acceptance of the current capitalist system by the politically conscious leadership of the UDF, Azapo, etc.

No acceptance of the plea for more time. Answer: we have been waiting for 50-60 years. Youth especially impatient: we are not waiting any longer.

Disregard for authority on the side of the youth.

Acceptance of the fact that a majority government will eventually come to power that, because of the weight in numbers, will be mostly black and coloured. For me the essential fact is not whether the majority will be black, but whether it will be responsible?

Acceptance that the transition towards such a government will be a difficult and painful process because we, as Afrikaners, have for too long denied blacks their political rights and have not prepared them for the responsible possession of them.<sup>3</sup>

### 4. But the alternative: civil war

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<sup>3</sup> Naudé's notes end here, save for the following ominous heading, which was perhaps meant to be elaborated on during the actual address.



# BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS DIVISIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA AND NORTHERN IRELAND: THE TENSION BETWEEN SAFETY AND CHALLENGE<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Maria Ericson<sup>2</sup>

## 1. Introduction

I'm very honoured to be invited to speak at this gathering, as the only presenter from the Northern hemisphere. It is also nice because Beyers Naudé and his friend Wolfram Kistner were actually the first local white people that I met in South Africa. I met them in their office at the Ecumenical Advice Bureau in Johannesburg in July 1996, in order to have an interview with them for my doctoral dissertation on reconciliation in South Africa and Northern Ireland. I remember with gratitude these charming elderly gentlemen who patiently answered my questions, and with whom I could also share my first personal impressions of South Africa.

While I had already visited Northern Ireland a number of times, and also (in 1992) stayed for a few months in an ecumenical community at the so-called "Peace Line" in West Belfast,<sup>3</sup> this was my first visit to South Africa. I had come only four

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<sup>1</sup> Paper presented at the mini-conference "Oom Bey for the Future," Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology, Faculty of Theology, University of Stellenbosch on 24 August 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Maria Ericson is a senior researcher and lecturer at Centre for Theology and Religious Studies, Lund University, Sweden ([www.teol.lu.se](http://www.teol.lu.se)). She visited South Africa in 1996 (one month), 1999 (3 months), 2001 (2 months), 2003 (2,5 months), 2004 (2,5 months) and 2005 (3,5 months).

<sup>3</sup> In the wake of the riots of August 1969, which marked the beginning of the Troubles (the era of civil unrest), so-called "peace lines" (e.g. combinations of walls and fences) were erected in certain "interface" areas in Belfast where the riots had been most intense. They were erected as safety measures with the aim of preventing further attacks and fighting between people on the opposite sides of the wall. My community (the Currach Community) was located next to the longest and most famous "peace line", separating the predominantly Catholic area called "Falls" and the predominantly Protestant area called "Shankill" in West Belfast. One of the few gates through the wall (open only during daytime) was located just outside our house. While our house was on the Shankill side, our ecumenical "sister community" (the Cornerstone Community) had been in existence on the Falls side ever since 1984. I ended up in the Currach Community by chance (or by God's guidance?). I was looking for a place to stay in Belfast from May until September 1992, while working on my MPhil thesis on intermarriage between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. During a visit to the Cornerstone Community, I heard that the founding members of the Currach Community had some practical problems. They had originally planned to move into the community house in April, but it turned out that the young Protestant couple could not come until August, and its first Catholic member (Sr. Noreen) did not feel completely comfortable about moving over to "the other side" all by herself. My spontaneous comment was "but I need a place to stay". While they were quite happy to welcome me in their home, I was also quite happy about finding a house to share with nice people in an "interesting" area where I could even, simply by living my every-day life in this particular place, be part of a local initiative to "bridge the divide". In the end it was not only Sr. Noreen and myself who moved in initially, as we were also joined by

days earlier, travelling together with a group from the Swedish Student Christian Movement, and I had spent these first four days in Soweto, where our South African partner organisation had organised accommodation for us at the Evangelical Lutheran Centre. But from now on I was going to be alone in downtown Johannesburg for a few days, meeting various people in connection with my research. And since the latest reports about violent crime had travelled fast to Sweden (just as the news about apartheid and its consequences had done years before), I was a bit nervous about moving around by myself. Yet, I also knew that I (just as had been the case in Northern Ireland) had to learn to live with the tension between, on the one hand, being mindful of safety and, on the other hand, being prepared to be challenged or even take risks. This *tension between safety and challenge* also emerged as an important theme among the initiatives to bridge divides and heal relationships that I came across in the course of my research, and in this presentation I will share with you some of my observations and reflections in that regard. But first I will give you some background information about my case studies and the focus of my research.

## 2. My case studies and research focus

My dissertation was a combination of peace and conflict research, theology and ethics. Initially<sup>4</sup> I noted that reconciliation in, or after, armed conflict tends to be identified with *two particular processes*:

- 1.1 To “*bridge the divide*” of negative attitudes, stereotypes and images held by people in a context of conflict – in order to build mutual trust and new relationships across their divisions;<sup>5</sup>
- 1.2 To “*deal with the past*” by healing the damage caused in the course of the conflict, looking at the needs of victimised persons and groups, as well as those of the perpetrators of violence, and seeking to build, restore or transform the relationship between them.

In the first type of process, both parties involved are challenged to question their own established viewpoints, attitudes and practices in order to be able to move beyond the prevailing divisions. In the second type of process, society at large and, especially those who have perpetrated, or benefited from, victimisation of certain individuals and groups, are supposed to be challenged by the stories of those previously silenced and victimised. And, whether they like it or not, all

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two young Americans doing voluntary work in Belfast. The other members (the young Protestant couple and one Catholic priest) joined us in August. These ecumenical communities and their environment are described in Roulston 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Ericson, 2001: 21.

<sup>5</sup> According to Lederach (1995: 44), this is seen to be the task of “the reconciler” in the process of building peace during, as well as after, an armed conflict.

parties involved are faced with the challenge of how to transform, or build new, relationships with their neighbours and fellow citizens.

In *Northern Ireland* “reconciliation work” has basically been equated with providing space for encounters across the Catholic-Protestant divide in order to enhance mutual understanding and cooperation (i.e. the first type of reconciliation process). This has been a major task of the Ecumenical Movement in Northern Ireland ever since the start of the civil unrest (commonly referred to as “The Troubles”) in 1969. In comparison to the process in Northern Ireland, in *South Africa* “reconciliation” has in recent years largely been about “dealing with the past” and, in my impression, very much identified with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Yet, just as Northern Ireland faces the challenge of dealing with the past and addressing the needs of those who have suffered from the violence, South Africa “after the TRC” also faces the issue of bridging divides between people in a society which remains to a large extent very much divided. In that sense I believe that people in these two countries can learn from each other and one main motivation for my dissertation was to highlight important insights from various local initiatives for reconciliation.

In any search for reconciliation, however, there must be at least some degree of consensus regarding what was done wrong in the past, what the present problems consist of, and what future relationships to promote. My own starting point when searching for a research focus within the field of ethics was therefore that both peace researchers and ethicists have stressed the importance of shared values and norms as a basis for peaceful coexistence and co-operation. *But* a major challenge is how to interpret and apply these shared norms and values in concrete situations. For instance, in my interactions with people in Northern Ireland ever since the late 1980s I noted that everyone I met said that they wanted “peace”. The “only” problem was that they did not want “peace at any price”, but they wanted a “just peace”. And for Republicans a “just peace” was a “peace with British withdrawal” - while for their opponents a “just peace” was “peace without conceding to IRA demands”. In South Africa I found that people interpreted reconciliation quite differently - some stressing the need for restitution, while others speaking of reconciliation as “to forgive and move on”. Such divergent interpretations of what constitutes a proper, or just, “peace” or “reconciliation” (and hence what common future to strive for), would partly be rooted in different experiences and perspectives, depending upon one’s position in society and one’s role in the conflict. With this in mind, I looked at reconciliation as a process in which the following dominant elements of the “*moral landscapes*” held in a war-torn society are addressed:

- *Experiences* of trauma, bereavement, separation and socio-economic inequalities;
- *Views of the conflict, its history and its causes;*

- *Identifications and loyalties;*
- *Views of oneself and of “the other” (i.e. one’s adversary);*
- *Norms for interaction, and interpretations of values such as “peace” and “reconciliation”.*<sup>6</sup>

I was particularly interested in the work and experiences of *ecumenical and some other church-related groups, in political reconciliation initiatives* (in South Africa, of course, the TRC, in Northern Ireland the peace agreement of April 1998 and its subsequent implementation), and finally, in *the perspectives of victims of (direct physical) violence in the course of the conflicts and those organisations who worked with such victimised people.*<sup>7</sup> At the time of my own research it was too difficult and sensitive to find primary sources on the personal perspectives of the perpetrators. However, after the completion of the TRC’s amnesty process in mid-2001, a couple of “perpetrator studies” were carried out in South Africa.<sup>8</sup> I also need to put in a word of caution here that it is not always that easy to fit people into neat mental boxes. While the people I interviewed were mainly oriented towards working with victims, some of them explicitly stressed that the categories of “victim” and “perpetrator” were not clear-cut, since some victims that they supported (by counselling, etc.) “in somebody else’s book might be called perpetrators”.<sup>9</sup>

For me as a Christian theologian, a particular challenge is dealing with *the ambivalent role that the Christian religious tradition has played in various conflicts*. In the Bible reconciliation with God, through Jesus Christ, is intimately connected

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<sup>6</sup> See further my theoretical discussion in Ericson 2001: Ch. 3.

<sup>7</sup> I recognise that the term “victim” has been contested among people with victimising experiences as they have felt that this terminology disempowers (rather than empowers) them by obscuring the fact that those who are still alive despite their experiences are not only passive “victims” but also active “survivors”. The process of recovery from trauma has also been seen as one of moving on from being victims to becoming survivors. A problem with the term “survivor” is, however, that of definition. Does the category of “survivors” encompass everyone who is still alive, or only those who have achieved a certain degree of recovery? I personally prefer the term “victimised people”, thereby underlining that they are not only “victims” but above all *people* who have been subjected to violent experiences, and who are currently at different stages in their process of recovery. I do, however, use it interchangeably with the term “victims”, since that is the term used in the official documents (i.e. the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Final Report* and *We will Remember them – Report of the Northern Ireland Victims Commissioner, Sir Kenneth Bloomfield KCB*, presented in April 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Abrahamsen & Van der Merwe 2005; Foster, Haupt & De Beer 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Brandon Hamber, Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, Johannesburg, 19 October 1999. A similar point was made in Northern Ireland (Interview with Martie Rafferty, Kairos Initiative, Belfast, 10 September 1998). The South African clinical psychologist Trudy de Ridder-Borain had found that those of her clients who had the double experience of both being a victim and a perpetrator of violence (e.g. ex-combatants) were the most difficult ones to work with, since “it is particularly difficult for people to relate to both identities. But both identities in a way support one another”. See her contribution in the “TRC Seminar: Should perpetrators be included in the reparations and rehabilitation policy process and in the reconciliation process?” 28 May 1997 ([www.truth.org.za/papers/perpet.htm](http://www.truth.org.za/papers/perpet.htm)).

with reconciliation with one's neighbours. Through the work of Christ, Christians have become a "new creation", entrusted with the "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:17-19). They are obliged to reconcile with their neighbour before approaching God at the altar (Mt. 5:23-24), and are even instructed to love their enemies and forgive those who trespass against them (Mt. 5:43-48 and 6:12-15).

Yet, the churches also tend to mirror the ideas and structures of established society, and to harbour divisions within themselves. In *Northern Ireland*, religious and national identifications are so closely linked that "Catholic" and "Protestant" have become shorthand terms to identify the main "sides" in the conflict – although it is more correct to use the political terms "Nationalist" for those wanting a united Ireland (among whom Republicans were also prepared to use armed force) and "Unionists" for those who want Northern Ireland to remain part of Britain. In *South Africa*, as this audience already knows, the churches came to mirror colonial and apartheid society,<sup>10</sup> one prime example being the Dutch Reformed Church "family", of which Beyers Naudé was a member and within which he sought to build bridges.

However, one also needs to recognise the diversity *within* existing structures, between those "tendencies in each individual, Church, and community" that either "fuels conflicts and erects barriers", or "defuses tension and builds bridges".<sup>11</sup> In my research I was primarily interested in the last tendencies, i.e. the ones that seek to overcome divisions and heal relationships, although I also wrote about the other tendencies as a necessary background. Finally, after this lengthy introduction, I'm coming to my observations regarding the tension between safety and challenge.

### 3. Establishing "safe" and "challenging" spaces

One important expression that I came across both in Northern Ireland and in South Africa was that of "a safe space". A common strategy for various ongoing reconciliation initiatives that I visited was to give people from opposing "sides" the opportunity to share their life stories and personal experiences of the conflict with each other. This was an important way to enhance mutual understanding by broadening the "moral landscapes" of the participants to include also experiences and perspectives of people from "the other side". Such encounters could be a source of empathy and relationship-building across divisions by giving the participants the opportunity to discover "the others" as fellow human beings – with similar needs, fears and experiences.<sup>12</sup> But in order for that to happen, you first needed to create a "safe space" where people could come together. Here "safety" carried various meanings:

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<sup>10</sup> "Faith Communities and Apartheid..." 1999.

<sup>11</sup> Bailey, 1988: 148.

<sup>12</sup> Summarised in Ericson, 2001: 447.

1.1 *Physical safety*, which first of all meant a space that people could enter without being killed or injured and that was also perceived as “safe enough” by all participants. Here the location of the venue was very important. In Northern Ireland the meeting places that I visited were, for instance, located either in so-called “interface” areas, i.e. on the border between predominantly Catholic and predominantly Protestant (often working-class) residential areas (one example being the ecumenical community where I stayed), or in a more quiet and mixed middle-class area easily accessible to people from “both sides”, or in a nice and quiet place out in the countryside (which also served as a place of recreation for people from the most troubled areas).<sup>13</sup> In South Africa it would of course (due to the apartheid geography with its greater physical distances between various “types” of areas) be more difficult to set up a “mixed” community right “in the middle”. So how do you then combine accessibility and safety for all participants? Setting up, or going away to, a nice and quiet retreat or conference centre a little bit out of town (and organising transport for the participants) appeared to be the most common option chosen by the organisations that I visited.

When the situation was too tense for people even to meet in person, then video could be used as a “safe space”, as in a “video dialogue” project that I came across in one of the areas in South Africa characterised by strong divisions between supporters of the ANC and Inkatha. Here people from both sides used a video camera to film their own respective groups and environments. These films were then put together into one video, which was shown to both sides of the community at a “safe” and neutral venue, and followed up by a number of dialogue workshops. In the words of two of the facilitators:

“So our experience then was that the video emerged to be a powerful medium and a tool to bring together people that otherwise wouldn’t talk to each other, and all of a sudden see them talking and embracing each other and you know, loving each other, re-establishing the friendships that people had had.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> In Northern Ireland there is a strong social class dimension with regard to how the conflict is experienced. So-called “working-class areas” (with up to 50% unemployment) are much more segregated along Catholic/Protestant lines. They have also been particularly affected by the violent conflict: a majority of the victims as well as of the paramilitaries from both sides come from these areas, and in the Catholic working-class areas the army and police presence has been particularly strong throughout the Troubles. A second type of area that has been hard hit by division and violent conflict is some rural areas along the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Bongani Mtshali & Sam Motsitsi, Video Dialogue Project, Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre, Roodeport (Johannesburg), 21 October 1999.

This observation of the video as a “safe space” also highlights the importance of the regular media as a means of enhancing mutual understanding and empathy across divisions by giving opportunity and space for the telling of life stories of people from different sides. In what ways do the media challenge existing stereotypes? Or do they rather reinforce these stereotypes?

Another important aspect of physical safety, highlighted especially by those working with victims of gross human rights violations in South Africa, but also to an extent in Northern Ireland, is that of *access to food, shelter, medical care, etc.* A daily struggle to secure basic material needs (a situation which remains for many of the victims who testified before the TRC<sup>15</sup>) leaves people with very little space to deal with their past or reach out to others. With people living below the poverty line – how can you expect a reconciled society? Thus, initiatives for story-sharing need to be seen in the wider perspective of social and economic justice.

- 1.2 *Psychological and social safety*, i.e. a space where one could speak about one’s personal experiences without being interrupted, ridiculed or disputed. Here the design and rules for interaction in the group sessions were of the utmost importance, and the joint formulation of norms and values within each group was encouraged. This was most explicitly expressed in the case of the Corrymeela Community (the biggest and oldest reconciliation group in Northern Ireland), where the participants were asked to formulate their rules for interaction on the basis of their answers to the question: “What would help you feel confident about talking about difficult things?” The rules formulated by the group tended to include: confidentiality, mutuality, and asking questions in a way that enabled others to speak.<sup>16</sup> I actually also experienced a similar process, leading to similar rules, in the Healing of Memories Workshop which I attended in Cape Town in 1999. Such confidential spaces could also serve as a complement to official initiatives like the TRC. While story-sharing in the *public arena* implies public acknowledgement and the ability for a wider audience to be challenged, story-sharing in the *unofficial arena* provides the safety of privacy.

The establishment of safety is also integrally linked to *power*, and to the struggle for power, hence the power dynamics between the participants need to be taken into consideration. For instance, can you really speak openly with someone upon whom you depend to earn a living? Being in a subordinate position, *or* losing one’s dominant position, could make people less confident and less able to express themselves and/or listen to “the other side”.<sup>17</sup> In the story-sharing initiatives the

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<sup>15</sup> See e.g. *Iphema Ndaba...*, November 2003 to September 2004: 2.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Trevor Williams, Leader of the Corrymeela Community, held in Linköping (Sweden), 5 August 1999.

<sup>17</sup> On “safety and power”, see further Ericson, 2001: 436-437.

participants were, as pointed out above, to jointly ensure *an equality of space and power* between themselves. Thus, by the very way in which they were structured, these initiatives challenged remaining power discrepancies in society at large.

The focus on the sharing of experiences (rather than discussing the various viewpoints and issues in purely intellectual terms) could also be seen both as a way to ensure safety and an equality of power *and* as a more effective way of challenging the participants. According to Trevor Williams, leader of the Corrymeela community:

“... everybody is an expert in one thing and that is their own story, so everybody is equal as far as their experience, there can’t be contradictory experiences, ‘this happened to me and this is how I felt,’ that’s a matter of fact beyond contradiction. If you are arguing in a particular logical case... you’ve got a very intelligent person who can wipe the floor with another person so there’s a disparity there. So we try and make it safe by having equality not only in terms of *how* we talk, but also what we talk about by sharing our experiences together.”<sup>18</sup>

Yet it was also seen as the most effective tool for challenging established views of the conflict and to address sensitive issues such as policing:

“Say one Catholic family from West Belfast [i.e. one of the working-class areas hardest hit by the Troubles] may talk about their view of the police and about their experiences of the army and the police in their area, and that might be listened to by people whose family members, because they are Protestants and Unionists, are members of the security forces. So what we’re actually doing is helping people to confront the truth in terms of interpersonal relationships among people that they’ve got to know and whose stories they hear first-hand, meeting them eye-to-eye so they’re able to hear it in a way which is far more powerful and has a far more lasting effect because it’s situated within a relationship.”<sup>19</sup>

Another important aspect of safety was that people were *adequately prepared*. First of all, in the sense that they had been given the opportunity to *work through their own trauma* before meeting with “the other side” - especially if they were to meet with the direct perpetrator or perpetrator organisation. Victimised people needed

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with Trevor Williams, Leader of the Corrymeela Community, held in Linköping (Sweden), 5 August 1999.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Trevor Williams, Leader of the Corrymeela Community, Belfast, 8 September 1998. Throughout the Troubles about 90% of police have been Protestant and I am not sure to what extent the police reform stipulated in the Good Friday Agreement has managed to increase the number of Catholics in the force.



their own “safe spaces” where they had the opportunity to express their feelings of pain and anger and have their suffering acknowledged – to mourn the past, but also to incorporate the lessons of the past into their present life.<sup>20</sup> In certain cases safety and challenge were actually combined: in groups where victims from both “sides” shared their stories and mutually supported each other. I came across a number of such initiatives as well.<sup>21</sup>

Secondly, people needed to achieve a sense of *security in their own identity* before meeting with “the other side.” People I interviewed in Northern Ireland told me that so-called single-identity work was therefore often carried out among Protestants and Catholics before bringing them together. While some of those whom I interviewed stressed that it was equally needed for everyone, others suggested that it would be particularly valuable for people with low self esteem, such as those living in deprived (Protestant and Catholic) areas or those who were in minority in a specific town and/or had lost power there in recent years (such as Protestants in Derry/Londonderry or Catholics in Portadown). To give one concrete example: one lady from the Peace and Reconciliation Group in Derry/Londonderry told me how her organisation had approached a group of Protestant teenagers who initially said that they did not want to meet with Catholics:

“So we said, “Ok, what *do* you want?” And they wanted to find out about their history, they wanted to know more about their culture, they wanted to find out what it was like to be involved in violence, they wanted to find out, you know, political agendas of the parties. So we arranged to have speakers come down and talk to them about a lot of these issues and challenged them on their own thinking... and they are getting together again at the end of this month and we hope to take them away on a residential and begin to introduce Nationalism, Catholicism, Republicanism in a way that isn’t threatening to them.”<sup>22</sup>

In South Africa at the time of my research people seemed to be too preoccupied with the TRC, but my impression today is that identity issues are quite high on the agenda, as I frequently come across discussions about “How do you define ‘black’?”, “Who is an African?”, “What about Afrikaner identity?”, “Coloured identity?” etc., etc. One crucial issue thus seems to be: “How does the search for

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<sup>20</sup> Ericson, 2001: 99-101.

<sup>21</sup> Such as the Cross Group and the Survivors of Trauma in Northern Ireland, and the Stress and Trauma Healing Workshops held by the Diakonia Council of Churches in areas around Durban divided between the ANC and Inkatha.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Tanya Gallagher, Peace and Reconciliation Group, Derry/Londonderry, 3 September 1998.

(or re-negotiating of) identity go together with reconciliation in post-TRC South Africa?" I'd be curious about the views from *this* audience about these issues.

Questions of self-image and identity also highlight the importance of finding inspiration for safety and challenge in one's Christian (or other religious) tradition, and here I wish to highlight some elements of a moral landscape that could aid in defusing tension and building bridges: elements that were also very much part of the life and witness of Beyers Naudé.

#### 4. Some Christian sources of inspiration for safety and challenge<sup>23</sup>

##### 4.1 *View of oneself and of "the other"*

One necessary precondition for story-sharing has to do with the participants' view of "the other", i.e. that they have at least a minimal preparedness to recognise the *common humanity* of those from "the other side": why listen to, and take into account the story of, someone if you do not regard her or him to be a fellow human being from whom you can learn something?

Furthermore it was pointed out to me that in order to be able both to tell their own story *and* to listen to (and be challenged by) people from "the other side," people needed to be convinced of *their own* human dignity. The experience of dispossession and dependency may create a negative self-image (which inhibits people from talking) and make people prone to practise self-censorship for the sake of survival. It was also observed that within the (previously) dominant community, the experience of losing power could lead to a loss of self-confidence and hence of one's ability to enter into dialogue. The notion of *all* people (*both oneself and "the other"*) being *created in the image of God* can be both challenging and empowering in this regard: by serving as an inspiration to instil self-confidence, to assume a sense of responsibility for the welfare of others, to reach out to people from "the other side", *and* to be prepared also to *receive* hospitality from "the other". It inspired the ecumenical reconciliation groups in Northern Ireland. In South Africa it inspired the ecumenical resistance to apartheid of Beyers Naudé and his friends in the Christian Institute and the South African Council of Churches, as well as the continuing search for reconciliation during and after the TRC process.<sup>24</sup>

##### 4.2 *Identifications and loyalties*

Another important source of inspiration was a commitment to each other and to one's shared place of residence, something that had to do with one's identifications and loyalties. Here the question is: "Who do you identify with?" This, in turn, has to do with "Who you want to be?" and "Whose concerns do you

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<sup>23</sup> I have written more fully about these aspects in another article: Ericson, 2003.

<sup>24</sup> See further Ericson 2001: 231-232, 306-307, 402-403, 407-410, 437-440, 458.

make into your own concerns?" Here I would also like to highlight the importance of "*relational closeness*" to a violent event, where people (including those not physically present at the scene) tend to be affected emotionally according to the degree to which they can identify with the victim, asking themselves "Could this have happened to me or to any of my friends and family?" or did it merely happen to "the stranger," "the other," or even, "the enemy"?<sup>25</sup>

One severe enemy of reconciliation is therefore exclusive and conflicting ethnic or racial identifications and loyalties. At the heat of the struggle against apartheid, Beyers Naudé, while still not denying his white Afrikaner identity,<sup>26</sup> repeatedly called for "a larger concept of unity" replacing "lesser loyalties".<sup>27</sup> Other spokespersons for reconciliation that I met, or whose writings I have read, also stressed such *overarching* identifications and loyalties. They might be found both in a religious commitment to the God of *all* peoples, and in a (not necessarily religious) sense of a shared belonging to, and pride in, one's country or even one's local town.<sup>28</sup> Expanding one's circle of friends to include those from "the other side" would also increase one's ability to feel relational closeness, as could imagining oneself in the position of "the other" (an imagining which could be aided through, for instance, role play).

#### 4.3 Norms and values

Against a "culture of silence" and a "culture of violence", reconciliation initiatives stressed the importance of non-violence and dialogue. Already in his inaugural address at the opening of the Christian Institute in 1963, Beyers Naudé had stressed that "*there is no reconciliation without conversation and communication*".<sup>29</sup> In him, confrontation and criticism against an unjust system was always accompanied by continuous efforts (in public statements<sup>30</sup> as well as private conversations<sup>31</sup>) to reach out to South Africans of all backgrounds, including those from his own Afrikaner community, as well as black<sup>32</sup> people who in him finally found a "beacon of hope" that white people could change.

Likewise my other sources stressed that a necessary basis for reconciliation was the preparedness to *reach out and be hospitable also towards the one who is different from you*, not being inhibited by any fear of losing one's identity or being regarded

<sup>25</sup> The point about "relational proximity" is made in Smyth, 1998, p. 130.

<sup>26</sup> E.g. Anthonissen, 2005.

<sup>27</sup> E.g. Naudé, 1963.

<sup>28</sup> Ericson, 2001: 302-305 (on Northern Ireland), 400-402 (on South Africa).

<sup>29</sup> Naudé, 1963.

<sup>30</sup> E.g. Naudé, 1977 (just after the death of Steve Biko).

<sup>31</sup> As described in, for instance, Anthonissen (2005) and Boesak (2005).

<sup>32</sup> Here (and in the remaining part of this paper) I use the term "black" as a generic term encompassing all "non-white population groups". As indicated earlier, I am, however, also aware of the debates regarding identity and (self-)definition in post-April 1994 South Africa, as well as of the need to "bridge divides" also between these "population groups".

a “sell-out”.<sup>33</sup> One important Christian source of inspiration would of course be *the calling to love one’s neighbour and even one’s enemy*. Another motivator might be curiosity and positive interest in “difference,” actually finding it more enriching to meet with people who are different from oneself than merely to stay within one’s own fold. I must confess that such a “curiosity” has been a strong motivating force for me. However, I also realise that in a divided society coming out of armed conflict, where “the others” are not only “different” but also perceived (or even experienced) as harmful or dangerous – *there* the values of non-violence and dialogue, and the call to love “the other” as oneself (as a fellow human being), would probably be needed as an extra source of inspiration.

##### 5. Safety and challenge in the life of Beyers Naudé

In the course of the research for my doctoral dissertation I became increasingly curious about the personal life stories of the men and women whom I interviewed. What had made *them* leave their “safe spaces” in the first place, in order to come and work for, or even create, organisations or communities that brought people together across the divisions of their societies? In what ways had *they* been challenged? My interviews focused primarily on the present and on the work of their respective organisations, even though glimpses of such personal stories did surface occasionally. I was therefore intrigued to come here and listen to *how Beyers Naudé was challenged* from his student years onwards. In the first place through his wife Ilse who exposed him to the mixed church services and open relationships between white and “coloured” inhabitants at Genadendal mission station. Then intellectually - by overseas people as well as by Afrikaner dissidents (including his favourite professor BB Keet) who questioned the biblical basis of apartheid. And finally when he took up the invitation of young DRC missionaries to come and share the experiences of how their black parishioners suffered from the implementation of apartheid.<sup>34</sup> Clearly he was challenged, both through personal encounters and intellectual reflection, to *broaden, and even transform, his own moral landscape*: to abandon the view of the conflict so entrenched in large sections of his Afrikaner community, to widen his circle of friends as well as his identifications and loyalties, and to reinterpret his conceptions of “justice” and “reconciliation”. As well as to create “safe spaces” in apartheid South Africa where people from very different walks of life could meet, support *and* challenge each other: both in the Christian Institute (with its interdenominational and interracial Bible study groups) *and* in his own home, during and after his period of house arrest. The communities from which Beyers Naudé received hospitality, and within which he found a new “safe space” (i.e. the broader ecumenical

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. *The Things that Make for Peace*, 1995: 7.

<sup>34</sup> As described in Pauw (2005).

community and the resistance communities), also played *their* part in sustaining his witness.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, Beyer's Naudé's life story is interesting also because it shows that no-one, not even him, can become a "great man" in splendid isolation. He, too, was part of greater whole within which many people, not the least his wife Ilse, played their little (or great) part. And within which he, too, came to play an important part in the lives of very many people. This shows the importance of community in our "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:17-19): the call and the privilege to "be there" for each other and to jointly create spaces that are both "safe" and "challenging" enough.

## 6. Conclusion and some final challenges

Throughout my research I have found it very enlightening to listen to these insights and stories from people who have committed themselves to reach out across the prevailing divides of their societies. Their realisation that you need to meet (and "be with") people "where they are" (both physically and emotionally) is an important insight. But at the same time you cannot simply leave people where they are: you have to find a way to move forward together. It is in that tension that I can see a dilemma: how do you identify the "right" dosages of safety and challenge in each particular situation? What is the greater risk (as a church and as an individual Christian): to be too timid and cautious, or to be too impatient?

Another important observation is that institutional churches, in order not merely to mirror the ideas and structures of a divided society, also need people from within their own structures who, like Beyers Naudé had been, are prepared to be challenged. The "safe spaces" that I visited, or heard about, would never have been established in the first place had it not been for people who were prepared to take risks and to leave *their* "safe spaces" (or "comfort zones") without knowing the outcome. People like Beyers Naudé when he chose to take up the directorship of the Christian Institute; like my Catholic house mates in Belfast when they left their "safe spaces" and moved across to the predominantly Protestant side of the "Peace Line" in order to become founding members of our ecumenical community; and like countless other "bridge-builders" whom I have met in the course of my research. Like them, we cannot simply sit back and wait for "safe" and "challenging" spaces to come about: we have to be part of their creation. One way would of course be to create new spaces. Another way might be to ask critical questions about the spaces that we are already part of - both the general public space and our own particular spaces such as schools, universities, workplaces, churches and even our homes. What is the character of these spaces in terms of safety, power dynamics and rules for interaction? What stories are heard and acknowledged? How can these spaces be more actively utilised as spaces where

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<sup>35</sup> As described in e.g. Ackermann (2005) and Anthonissen (2005).

women and men, young and old, from various walks of life can meet in order to have their diverse moral landscapes broadened and challenged?

Such “every-day” initiatives could actually respond to another major challenge, highlighted by some of the organisations that I visited, namely how to realise what people had experienced in the specifically set up “safe spaces” also in their own home environments. One important point of establishing an ecumenical community such as ours also in an “interface area” was actually to be present in the home environment of those who were particularly affected by the conflict – not *only* to take them away to a nice recreation venue in the countryside and then leave them at that. I would be quite interested in hearing your ideas about what would be equivalent initiatives on the South African scene: here in Stellenbosch, or on the Cape Peninsula, or in the Western Cape?

Finally, I could also detect a particular challenge in South Africa, namely that of mutuality in coming to each other’s spaces. While recognising that there are exceptions (some of them sitting in this room), my personal impression from my stays in your country is nevertheless that on the whole black people seem to be more prepared to enter into, and become part of, predominantly white environments than vice versa. Quite a few black people that I have met (and I have stayed mainly in predominantly black places in South Africa<sup>36</sup>) expressed a certain impatience about the lack of mutuality in that regard. In the words of one person whom I interviewed in Lamontville (one of the townships outside Durban):

“Our fellow white South Africans... they are really not genuine... In my church... our white counterparts would hardly come to the meeting if it is here in Lamontville, because “no, it’s not safe”... and yet we’re talking about the new South Africa... Is it the New South Africa only if I go to Woodlands or to Montclare or where-ever? And you’re talking [about] Christians.”<sup>37</sup>

How would a church commemorating Oom Bey, who went out to “see and experience for himself,” respond to such a challenge?

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<sup>36</sup> Not until I came to Stellenbosch in March earlier this year did I actually reside in a predominantly white area in South Africa. Previously I had, stayed mainly in (student) residences in the inner city areas of Johannesburg and Durban (close to the offices which I needed to visit during daytime), or in the residence of the University of the Western Cape, which was also within walking distance to my office and to many of my close friends. At first I stayed in these places because that was the accommodation given to me, or suggested to me, by my hosts, but I returned to them on subsequent occasions because I liked it there.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Thobile Madlala (facilitator in the Diakonia Council of Churches’ Stress and Trauma Healing Programme), Lamontville Community Resource Centre, Lamontville (Durban), 15 October 1999.

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FROM THE ARCHIVES  
AN INTERVIEW WITH BEYERS NAUDÉ<sup>1</sup>

Dr Keith W. Clements<sup>2</sup>

*Keith Clements (KC):* Just tell me who you are and how you would describe yourself.

*Beyers Naudé (BN):* I am Beyers Naudé. I am here at The Breakwater Lodge at the present moment for the Bonhoeffer Conference. I am a minister of the black Dutch Reformed Church, now called the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa. And I'm still alive!

*KC:* Now Beyers – if I may call you such?

*BN:* With pleasure.

*KC:* I mean, we regard you as a ... as a resister. Is there any retirement, ever, for resisters?

*BN:* I wish to state immediately: No. Not because there's not anything more to resist, but because once you become involved the way in which I became involved, you live through your witness and your work or otherwise you die: spiritually, mentally and otherwise. My wife has got problems with that answer. Because, she says, "Is there no time that we can at least have a little relaxing together?" I tried to give her more than that in the past. But to be serious: Yes, with a view to resisting, with what has happened in South Africa we're also deeply grateful. We're overwhelmed by what has been termed a miracle, what has happened in this country. But it does not imply that we've got to be less alert and on the watch for anything, you know, that may be wrong or may be going wrong. That is our task and that task we've got to fulfil up till the very end.

*KC:* But what does it feel like now for someone who's been through the heart of the struggle, as you were, now to be in the new South Africa?

*BN:* It is incredible, you know, the wealth and the depth of the feelings which simply bubble up and burst out in your heart and your mind. If I look back, for instance, if somebody had asked me on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 1990 whether I could not predict more accurately when the change would come in South Africa and

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<sup>1</sup> Copyright: Keith Clements. Published with permission.

<sup>2</sup> Keith Clements is a British Baptist minister, who at the time when this interview was recorded (1996) was at the international affairs desk of the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland. Subsequently (1997-2005) he was general secretary of the Conference of European Churches, Geneva, and now lives in active retirement in Bristol, UK. He recorded this interview with Beyers Naudé in January 1996 during the 7th International Bonhoeffer Congress . held in Cape Town, and extracts from it were used in a series of BBC radio programmes that he made on the Congress.

how soon it would happen, I would have said immediately, "I think it's going to take years and years." The 2<sup>nd</sup> of February, with that historic pronouncement of De Klerk, changed everything. Now looking back at the last little more than five years, there's been a series not only of incredible events, but of small miracles following the one after the other. And here we are in a new South Africa. Certainly, nothing is perfect, but we've no longer got a racist state; we've got a democratically elected government: every adult in this country has his or her vote, which was never the case before; we have an interim constitution which I think could become the example for many parts of the world; we have a very strong constitutional court; we have a government of national unity where even the most bitter enemies of the past have found a way and a method of working together; and we have the gift of God – as I see this – of a president who, with his wisdom, his insight, his vision and his commitment towards reconciliation, is assisting all of us in building up a new nation in South Africa.

KC: You referred to that difficulty of predicting in February 1990 about change. Do you think that says anything about our understanding of God working in history?

BN: It does, yes. Because, you know, time and again I've thought so much of how little we understand the way of God and what he is busy creating. And time and again ask myself, "Should we not be much more humble in our understanding of what God is wishing to tell us and convey to us, think much more deeply about what it means to be a child of God, reflect much more - not only personally but also together jointly with others - what does it mean to build the kingdom of God?" And especially, as far as South Africa is concerned: "How do we – may I use this term? perhaps it sounds arrogant; it's not meant like that – but how do we assist God in achieving his goal and his purpose for his church and for his kingdom and for his people of South Africa?" And, you know, I constantly marvel at the way in which we believe that we've got the wisdom, but that God creates a totally new situation, and out of what seemed the impossible comes a new and a glorious reality. And that is to my mind, you know, also part of the gift of grace of God – what it means to be one of his children. You can never - if you're really obedient - you never stop learning what he wants to convey to you.

KC: Was there any time in the period of the struggle – when you were under house arrest, when you were on trial, and so on – when you really felt tempted to, I would not say despair, but perhaps wish you didn't have a faith in God that was being tested, you know?

BN: Truthfully, I must say this afternoon: No, never. What did happen was that I constantly questioned the patience of God in allowing an evil system in South Africa, which was so evil, like apartheid, to continue, to flourish, to grow and to create so much havoc and suffering and pain in the lives of people. That was a terrible struggle in my mind. The old question: If you're a God of justice, if you're a God of love, if you're a God of mercy, why don't you do something much faster

and more rapidly than doing *this*? Why allow all this to happen? And I still don't have the answer to that. But it seems to me that there's an eternal wisdom, especially in the way in which God loves all of us, including those children who are disobedient or tend to support evil and injustice, and that is a lesson that I must still learn.

KC: Where did you get your strength from?

BN: I got it first of all from the Word of God. I got it from the example of Christ: his utterances, his life, his witness; I got it from the apostles, especially St Paul, but also the others; I got it from constant reflection on what God's intention was with his people and especially the suffering people in South Africa; I also got it from the tremendous strength, which was given to my wife and myself, of thousands of Christians inside and outside South Africa who assured us of their prayers, their thoughts, who wrote to us, who visited us when possible and encouraged us. It was a circle, a warm circle of love, which embraced us and carried us through this period. And I'll never for that, as long as I live.

KC: Now we can talk about the suffering and the cost of the struggle and resistance. What for you was the most difficult form that suffering took for you personally? What did you find hardest to cope with?

BN: I think what I found hardest to cope with was the suffering which was created especially to innocent blacks in South Africa, especially the young people, who came to me, sometimes one by one, who shared with me the detention, the agony, the torture, and what they went through. And then I said to myself, especially where they were black and the people who inflicted it on them were mostly, as I was, white, that I constantly said, "But God, why can't you let more whites suffer this way, so that the danger of the future racial conflict and the resurgence of a form of black racism, that that would be balanced in what was happening?" It was not an easy time. The other thing I think which deeply, you know, affected me was the fact that my witness affected my wife and our children, and I constantly asked myself, "Is there anything that I could do to prevent this inner suffering to my wife and my children?" But today, if I look back, both my wife and myself, we thank God because we went through a period which enriched our lives immeasurably. And if I look back today and you ask me would I have chosen otherwise, I would ... I immediately wish to say, No. Because what we received and what we experienced by way of spiritual, emotional enrichment of our lives and our selves far surpasses anything which we could have lost.

KC: Now this congress is about Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his context. How important has Bonhoeffer been to you?

BN: Bonhoeffer came to me a totally unknown person, but when I first read and listened and began to reflect on what Bonhoeffer was doing in Germany, I wrote an article in our little ecumenical paper, *Pro Veritate*: "The Time for a Confessing

Church is Now.” And I draw ... you know, in that article I drew the parallels between what was happening and what happened in Nazi Germany and in South Africa. I was careful to point out that there were distinct differences, and that what happened there was much more severe and oppressive than what was happening here. But even so, there were very striking parallels, including also the inner struggle of Bonhoeffer. How, in your opposition to injustice, at what stage do you come to the point where you say, I cannot let this be done and remain a non-violent struggler. At what stage are you entitled as Christian to turn to arms? And that was a constant inner battle with me. I could never come to as far as that because I said to myself: “Here are distinct differences between what happened here and there.” But the example of Bonhoeffer, and the challenge that he gave and, especially, the fact that he struggled with the whole question of your obedience to God in relation to your relationship to the state - what do you do when this becomes the major demand in your life? And I am very grateful that in this respect his – well, I would like to say, first of all, his tremendous *courage*, his theological insight, his willingness to give his whole *life* for the sake of justice and peace: that became a tremendous inspiration in my life.

KC: Is there any one of his sayings that always appeals to you?

BN: The last saying, you know, when he said goodbye, and he made it very clear: “I know that I am leaving, I am going to die, but it doesn’t matter. The main thing is what will remain and what will live.” And that has constantly remained with me my whole life: Beyers, it does not matter what happens to *you*. But what does matter is whether the witness which you give is one of obedience to God, is one of inspiration to the growth of His Kingdom. And if so, be not afraid, the day will come when truth will prevail.

KC: Now, that in a sense is the past; we are talking of the present now in South Africa, that before long there may be a generation which doesn’t remember much at first hand about the struggle. What is the relevance of that story now?

BN: To me the relevance of the story is this: that we have a new task in South Africa as Christians and as Church. We have a task to assist the government where possible. To do whatever is good and just in the restructuring and rebuilding of the country. But we also have the task, as never before, to be the watchdogs. Where the government is disobedient to the demands of the Kingdom, there it is our responsibility to address ourselves to the government and to say, “No. For your own sake, for the sake of the people, for the sake of the issue of justice, we have to say to you: do not go that way!” I think that is an absolutely vitally important task. And we are in this very fortunate position where our state president has on *more than one* occasion invited the churches and all faiths in South Africa to say: “Whenever you have a message to me - also a critical message with regard to what *you* believe is wrong - do not go and talk behind my back. Come and see me and let us discuss this and see whether it can be resolved.” And that is

a tremendous responsibility where I believe that we have the task to do so, the duty to do so, and the privilege to continue to do that. And if so, then I sincerely hope that our country will become an example of a government, of a people, and of all faiths in South Africa, which can build together on the future of our country.

KC: Are there any particular hopes that you would like to see fulfilled for South Africa in your own lifetime?

BN: Well, in the little time that may be left to me there are especially three hopes, if I may summarize them. First of all, it is absolutely essential that we bridge the tremendous gap between affluence and poverty in our country. For the sake of economic justice we cannot allow the situation to continue. There must be a greater distribution, a *just* distribution, of resources, of energy, of income, of life and the standard of living. Second is: we must see to the culture of corruption which has been slowly developing in our country, and also already a legacy, you know, of the old apartheid government. You cannot build a just society on corruption, on bribery, on dishonesty. And if we are able to do that, it will be tremendous. The third is: we must strengthen the ecumenical movement. The witness of the Church in South Africa can only be relevant and meaningful if it is a united witness of all those who confess Christ as Lord. No denomination in South Africa can continue to live and to give its witness on its own. Wherever any denomination tries to do that, it will fail. Never before have we had such an opportunity and we must grasp it with both hands and move forward - also as an example and a challenge to the unity of the Body of Christ around the world.

KC: On that theme, just coming towards the end now, your own relationship with the Dutch Reformed Church, in which you grew up, became a very tragic one. What is the relationship like now?

BN: There has been in many respects a tremendous change. First of all, the Dutch Reformed Church apologised, to me and to others who opposed apartheid, for the mistakes they made. And we gladly accepted that. Secondly, I have said to the leaders of the Dutch Reformed Church: All of us must move forward to this establishing of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa where *all of us*, regardless of our ethnic background, our language, our race, must be *one* in the Reformed family in order to build the Kingdom of God. But we must not remain only in the Reformed family. We must become part of the wider Body of Christ in South Africa where all of us contribute and make available this tremendous witness to the world.

KC: Just a penultimate question, bearing in mind this will be broadcast, may go out on the World Service, but particularly in the British context. Is there anything that you would like to say to the British people, British Christians?

BN: Yes. If I may I would like to say to the Christians and to the British people, you have, together with us, built South Africa in many, many ways. Whether *you*

wish to know this or not and whether *we* wish to know this or not, in many ways we have a joint responsibility for the building and restructuring of South Africa, of Southern Africa including the Christian witness. You cannot be absolved of that responsibility. I would rather wish to say, see it as a tremendous opportunity for a joint witness - not only in Britain, but also in South Africa.

KC: Finally, it might seem an odd question to ask, but thinking in the context of programmes and so on, have you any particularly favourite music, or hymns, or songs or anything that really expressed above all what you're about.

BN: Are you talking about church music?

KC: Yes.

BN: Well, church music, you know, I love Bach. I love so much of church music, especially organ music, it is wonderful. But I also love, you know, if I think of Mozart, Beethoven, of Vivaldi, of so many others that my wife and I enjoy and then we feel that this carries our lives and also when we have been under tremendous stress, just take a CD and quietly to listen to it and let that wonderful message, you know, let the sounds penetrate your whole being and bring calm to your soul and to yourself.

"South Africa is a microcosm of the contemporary world. Here white and black, East and West, rich developed First World and poor developing Third World meet as in no other country in the world: this sets a tremendous challenge, but it is also a unique privilege. In the melting-pot of this meeting Christians who want to live out their faith have an incomparable opportunity to witness to justice, love of neighbour, truth and compassion."

**Beyers Naudé**

*The Future and...colour, colonialism and communism*

"A Christianity which retreats into a personal piety with a faith divorced from life in all its aspects will not only lose its power to witness to the outside world, but it also stands in danger of losing its youth — and thereby its whole future. We plead, therefore, that the Church in South Africa in its religious instruction should explain the relation between the Christian faith and e.g. such crucial problems as race relations, labour conditions, entertainments, the rights and responsibilities of man. If the Church fails to do this youth will naturally turn to other agencies for instruction and inspiration with the painful result that the church will be the loser. And such a loss may be irreparable."

**Beyers Naudé**

*The Churches Answer of Young People's Questions*

"Beyers Naudé was a remarkable man, and he has left us a remarkable legacy. This book and those to follow in this series on public theology will help insure that this legacy is not lost, but instead remains a firm foundation on which we can build."

**Most Revd Njongonkulu Ndungane**

*Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town*

Foreword to *The Legacy of Beyers Naudé* and  
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